

THE ARGOSY.

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THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.

BY DARLEY DALE, AUTHOR OF "FAIR KATHERINE."

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE CONVENT.

THE sun was setting in a variable April sky as Father Ambrose and Vera drove to the convent. The wind was dying down and the clouds, which had been chasing each other merrily during the day, seemed quietly settling themselves, as though the splendour of the setting sun hushed their merriment and rebuked their stormy temper, and they were constrained meekly to assume the glowing golden tint he threw over them, and to conform themselves to his majestic rule.

The nuns were all in chapel except the Mother-Prioress and the portress when Father Ambrose and Vera reached the convent. He left Vera in the fly until the portress was sent away, and then he led her into the hall and presented her to the Prioress, an elderly woman with a sweet face and motherly manner. Vera felt exceedingly uncomfortable in her disguise when confronted with a genuine nun in a dress exactly like the one she was wearing; but the Mother-Prioress set her at ease at once; she took her hands, kissed her on both cheeks and assured her she was very welcome and that she would keep her secret faithfully.

"But you must change your dress before the others see you," said the Prioress with a rather scandalised air.

"Oh, yes! I am afraid it was very wrong of me to put it on, but I did not think of that; I was so anxious to escape," said Vera, and she looked so sweetly penitent that the Prioress forgave her immediately.

"Come with me, then, for we have no time to lose. Father Ambrose shall see you as early as he likes to-morrow morning after you have had a good night's rest."

Vera was then taken upstairs into a small bedroom plainly furnished but beautifully clean, and commanding a lovely view of the sea with Mont St. Michel rising out of it. Here she laid aside the

habit and put on the only dress the convent could offer her—a plain black one ; which in Vera's private opinion must have come out of the ark. However, she meekly donned it and smiled when the Prioress said it was a little penance for having worn the habit. Nor did she raise any objection to the black lace veil the mother pinned on her head and told her she must always wear during her stay in the convent.

"To-morrow we will send for a dressmaker and you shall order yourself a dress. I am afraid you will find it rather dull, for we have no other visitors just now, but we will try to make you comfortable."

"I don't think I shall mind the dulness. May I go where I like inside the convent ?" asked Vera.

"No ; you can't come inside the enclosure without leave from the Bishop ; the visitors' rooms are not in the enclosed part ; but you may go all over the garden. And we are close to you at night ; so you need not be nervous."

"I am not at all nervous ; but you will let me have my meals with you, won't you ?" said Vera, whose ignorance of convent life was very great.

"My dear child, no ; we allow no one except ourselves or other religious in our refectory ; but I will give you leave to come into my room at recreation and to the seculars' part of the chapel whenever you like."

"But I shan't see any of the nuns there, shall I ?" said Vera.

"Not very well. Can you sing ?"

"Oh, yes ; and I can play the organ too."

"Then you shall come into the organ-loft ; you will see there as well or better than if you were in the choir ; and if you like, you may help us in our music. The organist will be delighted if you will sometimes take her place."

"Oh ! I should love it. It is so kind of you to take me in. If I can be of any use I shall be so pleased. And I will try to be very good," said Vera sweetly.

The nun smiled and kissed her and thought how beautiful she was. And then she could not resist the temptation to pin some roses from a vase in the room, as fresh and sweet and blooming as Vera herself, on to her dress.

"Would you like to come into the chapel now ? Your supper won't be ready just yet, and we shall be in time for the 'Salve.' "

Vera assented to this and presently found herself in the organ-loft looking down on the beautiful chapel, as the setting sun poured through the coloured windows casting gleams of coloured light across the sanctuary and over the black veils of the white-robed nuns. At the bottom of the chapel stood a large marble angel holding a stoup of holy water, and as Vera looked down upon it the angel's wings seemed to glimmer with iridescent light like an opal as a ray of sunlight which pierced a coloured window rested for a moment upon

them. Vera almost expected to see the angel raise its glorious wings and fly away, but it remained motionless at its post as a sentinel on duty.

Just then the nuns all rose from their seats in the choir and walked in procession round the chapel headed by two novices in white veils carrying lighted candles in brass candlesticks, singing as they walked the "Salve Regina" in Dominican plain chant. Presently they knelt down, two only remaining standing, and these two walked between the long rows of kneeling nuns and sprinkled them with holy water; then they rose, the procession re-formed and they returned to their places singing St. Dominic's hymn.

Then the altar was lighted up for the Benediction, a priest came in, and falling on her knees Vera's clear young voice rang out in the "Salutaris Hostia" like an angel's, to the amazement of the nuns in the choir, who were too devout to gratify their curiosity by looking up to see where the voice came from. And then a little later when in the solemn hush the bell rang and Benediction was given, a sense of rest and peace, in spite of her troubles, fell over Vera, such as she had never felt before.

In a few days Vera was the pet of the convent and was allowed to do pretty much what she pleased; so that when Father Ambrose came to say good-bye on Monday morning, before he started for Woodford, she assured him that if only she could know for a certain fact that Captain Raleigh was assured of her innocence she should be perfectly happy in the convent. She promised Father Ambrose to remain with the nuns until he returned. She could not write to her lover, because of her promise to her father; otherwise she would have done so, and have sent the letter to Norwich to greet him on his arrival in England; for according to her calculation he would just be on his way home from India.

Little did she think he was that night sleeping only a stone's-throw from the convent; but perhaps this fact accounted for her troubled dreams. She dreamt he was at Woodford, and that her step-mother was trying to persuade him that she had taken the diamonds and shot Mark Brown; and in her dream she felt she must go back at once to Woodford and deny the charge. She must go alone, since Father Ambrose was gone; and therefore she must go disguised, as she had come.

She rose from her bed in her sleep, and dressed herself in the white habit and scapular which had been left in her room. The veil and guimpe and the long black cloak were gone and she searched in vain for them, having a vague notion that her costume was incomplete, and then at last she gave up the search. With her long golden hair rippling in wavy masses down her shoulders, she took a lighted candle in her hand, opened her bedroom door and walked downstairs.

When she reached the hall she found the hall door was bolted and

locked, and happily the key was not in the lock. She searched in the hall and in the portress's little room, but she could not find it; and at last she seemed to accept the fact that escape that way was impossible. Then she remembered in her sleep that she could get into the garden by a side door, and mechanically she turned to go towards it, forgetting that there was no exit from the high walled-in garden to the road. Her one need seemed to be to get outside the convent into the open air; and turning into the enclosure, oblivious of the fact that it was forbidden ground, she walked down the cloisters towards the garden door.

As she walked down the empty cloister, the distant sound of the nuns' voices reciting a psalm as they returned from their night office filled the air, but the sound did not reach Vera's sleeping ears. Every sense and every nerve were concentrated on one object, namely, to reach the open air. Suddenly, as she turned a corner and entered the corridor which led from the chapel, she came face to face with the long procession of nuns, looking very ghostly in the dimly-lighted corridor, wrapped in their long black cloaks and walking in pairs, their hands folded under their scapulars; but Vera did not see them. She walked on in the centre of the corridor till she reached the advancing procession, which divided somewhat abruptly to let her pass. Some of the frightened nuns thought they were meeting the ghost of one of their community long since dead; some of them recognised Vera, in spite of her habit and the strange look in her open eyes; but all were too well disciplined to speak in the cloisters, where silence was the rule. So she passed unhindered down the long lines of veiled figures until she reached the Prioress, who, startled as she was, could scarcely contain her delight at being a witness among many others of Vera's somnambulistic powers.

"It is Miss Tempest walking in her sleep; we must follow her," whispered the Prioress to the nun at her side; and turning round they left the other nuns to go back to their beds, while they followed where Vera chose to lead them.

On went Vera, her long golden hair streaming in heavy masses down her back long past her waist, down the now dark cloister; for the nuns had extinguished the gas as they passed, and her solitary candle only made the darkness visible. She glided past the chapel from which the nuns had just emerged, and then turned down another long corridor at the end of which was the door into the garden. Here she stopped and tried to open the door, but this too was locked and the key was not in the lock. Vera rattled the handle in vain, and then she put the lighted candle down on the floor and with both her little white hands drew back all the heavy bolts, and then tried in vain to open the locked door. Failing, she wrung her hands in despair, crying out as she did so:

"Arthur! Arthur! the door is locked! I can't come to you! Oh, what shall I do!—what shall I do!"

"Come back to bed," said the Prioress, gently taking one of Vera's hands in hers and giving the candle she had picked up to the other nun.

Her touch seemed to calm the sleeping girl, though it did not wake her; and she submitted to be led back to her room, sighing and sobbing as she went. Here the two nuns undressed her and put her to bed without waking her; but they were afraid to leave her alone, lest she should walk again; so they took it in turns to sit by her side until the bell rang for the nuns to rise, when they thought her safe.

Vera slept till nine o'clock and was then awakened by one of the lay sisters, who brought her her breakfast and a message that the Mother-Prioress wished to see her when she was dressed. Wondering what this could mean, and half afraid she was to be reproved for her late rising, Vera made haste over her breakfast and toilette. While she was thus occupied she noticed that the white serge habit, which had been in her room the night before, was gone, the Prioress having taken it away; but though surprised at this, Vera had not the slightest recollection of what had happened during the night and was amazed when the Prioress told her.

"Did all the nuns see me?" she asked.

"Yes; thirty-four of us can bear witness to your somnambulism; but as we can't go to England to give our evidence, I am not sure that it will be of much use."

"Oh, yes, it will! It will convince Father Ambrose and my father and Captain Raleigh; and I don't care what the rest of the world believes about me very much," said Vera.

Father Ambrose returned to Avranches a few days later, and his first action on arriving was to go and see Vera and tell her about the trial, and Captain Raleigh's arrival in England, and his meeting with her in her disguise.

"You were very near being severely punished for that freak; but see, I have brought you some letters: one from Raleigh and one from your father," said Father Ambrose; and Vera was soon too much occupied with her letters to think of anything else.

Whilst she was reading them the Prioress came in and gave the priest an account of Vera's sleep-walking in the cloisters, and received a slight reproof for not having written to him directly it happened and told him of it.

"It is most important evidence. I must telegraph to Raleigh and the Archdeacon, and say thirty-four people have seen her walking in her sleep; details to follow by letter. Vera is by no means out of this scrape yet. Mark Brown's case comes before the bench next Tuesday; but even if his perjury is proved, Vera's innocence is not established until the diamonds are found."

"Oh, I am so happy," interrupted Vera. "My father has given his consent to my engagement, and as soon as this case is settled we

are to be married. They, papa and Captain Raleigh I mean, seem to think I had better remain where I am for the present, as Mrs. Ryot-Tempest still believes I stole her diamonds and will prosecute me if she can."

"Never mind, my dear child; be patient and it will all come right in time. We will take care of you till you can go home, if you can put up with this quiet life," said the Prioress.

"I shan't mind the quiet life now I can write to Arthur every day; and to occupy myself I shall begin to get some of my trousseau," said Vera, looking as bright and happy as if no such things as false accusations existed.

Certainly love is the most absorbing of all the passions, thought Father Ambrose as he left the convent and pondered over Vera's utter indifference to her other troubles now that her love trouble was over; though to him it seemed that to be accused of stealing and shooting a man was a much greater trouble than to be separated from a lover.

But then Father Ambrose forgot that love troubles are the hardest of all troubles to bear; partly perhaps because they come before the heart is schooled to suffering, partly because if love's joys are the sweetest it is only fair love's sorrows should be the bitterest in a world where, on the whole, justice in the long run is pretty fairly meted out.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MARK BROWN FALLS OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE.

REUBEN FOREMAN left the police-court the day Mark's action against Vera was heard a happier man than he had been for months. His heart was lighter, for the burden of a secret sin had been removed. Once more he could look his fellow-men in the face and feel they knew the worst of him; he had nothing now to conceal from them. If they still respected him his conscience could no longer reproach him with being unworthy of their respect. Unworthy he was no doubt in a certain sense, but at any rate his neighbours would now honour him with their eyes open; it would be no blind admiration, for he had laid bare his secret soul with its stain of sin upon it to their eyes.

If, on the other hand, he had to suffer from not being held in such good repute as formerly, this would only be his due; he would gladly accept the penalty as part of his punishment. But on leaving the police-court he was greeted with the greatest cordiality and not a little admiration by all who knew him. He found people admired him more for his public confession than they blamed him for his sin. Even Norah, who was not given to paying him compliments and was always inclined to throw cold water on his religious fervour, said as he accompanied her to the station:

"You are a good man, Reuben ; a deal better than I gave you credit for."

Reuben smiled, for he had a vein of humour in his composition, and his sister's criticism struck him as quaint when he had just been trying to prove how wicked he was. His nature was a noble one, therefore his lapse into sin made him more watchful than before. True it is that the highest natures fall the lowest, but then they rise to a higher level than that from which they fell, by their penitence : they rebound after their contact with the earth.

On the following Sunday Reuben felt rather nervous when he entered his chapel ; but he need not have done so ; he was treated with as much reverence as ever, only when he came to take his Bible-class he found the young men and boys who attended it less reserved than formerly. They seemed to feel there was a bond of sympathy between them and their teacher which, if it had previously existed, they had been unconscious of. Reuben, upright, pious, stern as he was, was after all like them ; liable to the same temptations, liable also to fall ; and this knowledge drew them nearer to him ; so true is it that to a man's friends his faults sometimes endear him more than his virtues. It is easier to talk to a man on the same platform with ourselves than to one standing on a pedestal above us.

From that time Reuben's influence over his class was stronger than before ; for sympathy is a very great power for good ; it is a rope which has saved many a drowning soul.

The next evening Reuben was at the forge rather later than usual, having some work to finish after his men had left at six ; and he was still at his anvil when he received a visit from a tramp, who stopped at the door and looked in as he passed through the village. He was tidily dressed in corduroy trousers, a velveteen coat and a sealskin cap, but his appearance nevertheless struck the blacksmith as somewhat suspicious, for the man had a young face and yet his hair and beard were almost white. He made a few commonplace remarks, and Reuben, who was always on the look out for a soul to save, encouraged him to talk, hoping to direct the conversation into a convenient channel for his purpose. The blacksmith had just remarked that his furnace was almost out and was about to follow up this leading observation with a reference to another furnace whose fire will never be quenched, when the man somewhat suddenly asked if Reuben could tell him where Captain Raleigh was staying.

"Maybe I can ; but why do you want to know ?" said Reuben.

"He is the lover; isn't he, of Miss Tempest up at the Rectory ? Ah ! She's a plucky lady, she is ; and as handsome as she's plucky," returned the man.

"Well, I don't know that there is any harm in saying he and Miss Vera do walk together, but I don't see what business it is of yours, my man," said Reuben.

"Perhaps not, but I have some very particular business with the

gentleman all the same, and it is business that won't do the young lady any harm neither ; so if you'll tell me where I can find him, you'll save me some trouble, maybe, and I'll take it kindly of you."

" He is staying up at the priest's house next to the convent ; he is a Papist, more's the pity," said Reuben.

" Thank you, I'll wish you good evening," said the man abruptly, leaving the forge and starting off in exactly the opposite direction to the one Reuben had indicated, at a pace by no means consistent with his grey hairs and beard.

Reuben left his anvil, and going outside the door looked after his strange guest for a minute or two, shading his eyes with his hand from the sun, now about to dip behind the hill the man was mounting.

" He seems familiar to me, somehow ; I wonder where I have seen him before. It is getting late ; I'll shut up shop and go home ; perhaps I shall come across him again—he has gone my way," said Reuben to himself.

Accordingly the blacksmith shut up his forge, lighted his pipe and set off up the hill to his cottage. As he passed the Rectory gate, to his surprise he saw Mark Brown leaning on it in earnest conversation with his late visitor.

" Strange ! I know I have seen that man before, somewhere. What can he have to do with Mark Brown, I wonder ? No good, that is certain. I'll walk down after supper and call on the Captain and see if my gentleman has been to see him," thought Reuben as he mounted the hill-side in the evening light.

It had been a glorious day—too hot for early May ; and almost the first real spring day they had had that year. The new grass was of a vivid green, the more brilliant in contrast with the still numerous leafless trees whose bursting buds were only waiting for another such day of sunshine to put forth their tender leaves. Here and there a sycamore was already in leaf, and its colour, if as brilliant as the grass, was a more delicate green ; the larches too were shooting out their new needle-like leaves, bristling with sprigs and casting a shade of emerald green which deepened every day over the hill-side ; the swampy meadows near the canal were gleaming with the burning gold of the wild marsh marigold ; the fields above were yellow with cowslips and primroses ; the canal banks were strewn with the untidy blossoms of the "faint sweet cuckoo flowers ;" all nature was awakening from her long winter sleep, and the birds were chanting a reveille in notes of passionate joy.

If the larks ceased for awhile as they dropped to earth to attend to their household duties, the thrushes filled up the interim ; if the thrushes grew weary towards evening the blackbirds took up their song ; and all the while the sober linnets and finches murmured in their sweet undertones an accompaniment to the more elaborate performance of the other birds, while the cuckoo sang her monotonous song unceasingly. Reuben was used to all these sights

and sounds and paid as little heed to them as most men of his class usually do ; but suddenly he stopped and listened, for he fancied he heard the nightingale. Yes, there is no mistaking that song ; the nightingale had come, but her song was not yet perfect ; the notes of liquid sweetness dropped from her passionate soul in short rippling passages ; later on her song will lengthen, her ecstasy will be sustained ; this evening's effort was only a foretaste of what was to come as the days lengthened.

"It is the nightingale, sure enough, but not in full song. It isn't a bird, it is a spirit ; the spirit of spring," said Reuben as he listened. "I wish my Janet were here to listen to it, she always loved the nightingale ; but the Lord wills otherwise. She is happier out in America than she would be here."

And then Reuben stopped, and taking off his hat prayed, not that Janet might come home to him, but that God's will might be done in the matter. He was beginning to feel that the best prayer is not, as most people imagine, to try to bend God's will to man's, but to bend our will to God's. This is true prayer, for this is true union, and the end and object of real prayer is union with God.

Reuben was beginning to understand the secret of true happiness, his public confession had raised him to a higher level in the spiritual life ; he had begun to feel that to will what God wills is real happiness, and when once a man realises that, he carries his heaven about with him. He has an antidote for every pain, a salve for every wound, comfort for every sorrow, consolation for every grief. We need no longer distress ourselves about the happiness of such a man, though he may still have many troubles. The path to this paradise is a stormy one even for those who are saints by nature ; for those who are saints by grace it is a fiery furnace ; but it is a heaven which can be entered even on this side of the grave, and the blacksmith by a miracle of grace had entered it.

The nightingale and the thoughts it brought put the stranger out of Reuben's mind for awhile, but after his supper he remembered him, and set out to call on Captain Raleigh : a task by no means congenial to him, for he was a bigoted Baptist and regarded Catholics as little better than heathen idolaters. But for Vera's sake he overcame his prejudice, thinking that in all probability his strange visitor had something to do with the diamond robbery.

The result of this visit was that at eleven o'clock that night the Captain and the blacksmith walked up to the Rectory together, the former carrying a riding-whip instead of a walking-stick. When they were near the house, Lion barked, but a word from Raleigh silenced him. He then went round to the back-door, where he remained like a sentry, while Reuben hid behind a tree from which he could command a full view of the front of the house. There for the moment we will leave them in order to be present at Mark Brown's interview with the bearded stranger.

Mark had been engaged in sweeping the drive when he was accosted by a familiar voice, and on looking round found himself close to an unfamiliar face.

"Well, Mark, and how are you getting on?"

"None the better for seeing you," returned Mark, with his habitual courtesy.

"How is your arm? Good shot your young lady is, isn't she?" continued the man with a grin.

Mark swore an audible oath.

"Go ahead, your time is getting short; your case begins to-morrow, doesn't it?" asked the stranger.

"What has that to do with you?" said Mark savagely.

"Nothing; but it would be rather awkward for you if that fellow Freeman were to turn up, wouldn't it?"

Mark turned as pale as death and leaned over the gate to support himself, for his knees shook under him.

"That was a shabby trick you played him, stealing those diamonds before you handed him the case," said the man, who was on the opposite side of the gate to Mark, and was standing with his arms folded on the top of it.

"It is a lie; I never touched the diamonds," said Mark. "Freeman had them and never gave me so much as a shilling for my share in the work."

"That is false; the case was empty," interrupted the stranger.

"How do you know that?" said Mark in astonishment.

"Because I picked it up. Look here," and the man pulled off his sealskin cap and with it his false grey hair and beard, and showed the clean-shaven face of Freeman.

"Freeman!" ejaculated Mark, in a terror-stricken voice.

"Yes, I am Freeman. And just listen here, Mark Brown: you hand them diamonds over to me to-day and you'll never hear of me again; refuse to do so and you'll hear me give evidence against you to-morrow; that is what I am down here for. Now, I'll give you five minutes to decide. Hand me the diamonds and it will be all right for you; refuse, and I go straight from here to the Captain and turn Queen's evidence against you to save the young lady. Which is it to be?"

"I can't give you the diamonds; I have not seen them; I swear I have not," said Mark.

"You swore falsely the other day. It is no use trying that game on with me. Give me the diamonds or I go to the Captain."

"I have not seen them; I have not touched them," whimpered Mark in an agony of fear.

"All right; I am off to Captain Raleigh. I'll leave you my wig as a legacy, for I am not sure that you are not speaking the truth for once in your life; and if so, we have both been made fools of by some one cleverer than either of us. Anyhow, if I were you, I'd be absent when they want me to-morrow." And before Mark had sufficiently re-

covered himself to attempt to pursue him, Freeman was running down the hill at a break-neck pace, leaving the wig and beard on the gate.

As a drowning man will catch at a straw, so Mark seized the false hair. It was the straw which might save him. In it he might be able to escape from Woodford before his case was opened the next day ; for escape he must or be committed for trial for perjury since Freeman was going to turn Queen's evidence against him. He was an arrant coward, and the prospect of penal servitude which might well have alarmed a braver man, terrified him. Submit to it he could not ; escape from it he must. He seized the wig and beard, and taking off his cap, put it on his red head, and then walked down to the canal to see by his reflection in the water if the disguise were sufficient protection. He came to the conclusion that it was. No one, he thought, would recognise him, and his first impulse was to throw down his broom and start off then and there across the country to a distant station and there take a ticket for London. He had just sufficient money in his pocket to take him there. But then he remembered he had four or five pounds at the Rectory, and desperate as his case was, he was not inclined to sacrifice that ; he loved money too dearly to part with it so easily.

No, he would escape, but he must go back and get his money and as many of his belongings as he could carry with him ; so he put the false hair in his breast pocket and returned to finish his work. The servants all watched him too closely for him to hope to escape until night, and even then he would find it difficult, for by the Archdeacon's orders the butler now slept in his room, and always took the precaution of locking the door and putting the key under his pillow. However, Mark knew the servants had all sworn he should not run away and forfeit his bail if they could help it, and he was given to understand that the Fuchsia-bells, Holmes and the kitchen-maid took it in turns to watch for so many hours each night lest he should evade the butler's guard.

This was decidedly awkward ; but as Mark went home to supper with his wits sharpened by fear, he hit upon a plan by which he trusted to render his self-constituted gaolers incompetent to fulfil their task. He would drug them. This would not be difficult, for it was his duty to draw the supper beer for the kitchen, and he knew there was a bottle of laudanum in the Archdeacon's dressing-room. When he got to the Rectory he found, as he expected, all the servants busy, for it was the dinner-hour ; the butler and Mary were waiting at table, the cook dishing up the dinner with the kitchen-maid's assistance, and Holmes was as usual, at this time, out in the shrubbery with a lover ; so Mark had no difficulty in going upstairs unobserved and getting the laudanum. He then went to his own room, put all his money in his pocket and packed his best suit of clothes and a few other things into a bundle, which he hid under his bed to be ready for him when he started that night. Then he changed his

clothes as he always did before supper, for he had to go into the drawing-room to prayers before he went to bed. By the time he had made all these arrangements the bell rang for the servants' supper, and he went down to the cellar to draw the beer.

He filled a large jug and then took a long draught out of it, intending to decline any at supper. Then he poured a good dose of laudanum into the jug and refilled it, leaving the laudanum-bottle in the cellar, resolving that if they wanted any more beer they should also have some more laudanum. The beer was drunk without any comment, and none troubled themselves about Mark's abstinence, cook cynically remarking :

"If he does not want any beer, there is all the more for them that does."

At prayers Mark had the satisfaction of seeing the butler nod two or three times in spite of the strenuous efforts he made to keep awake, and when they all rose from their knees, Mary had to be nudged to get up, sleep having overcome her devotion. They none of them, however, suspected anything amiss, but attributed their sleepiness to their hard work, and hurried up to bed somewhat earlier than usual.

Mark was obliged to go through the farce of undressing and getting into bed, but before his head was on his pillow the butler was sleeping soundly, as his snores testified. Mark put out the candle and redressed himself, taking care to put on the wig Freeman had lent him, and then he sat down to wait till he should judge it safe to make his escape. The house was perfectly quiet, and soon after eleven o'clock had struck Mark determined to start. He had no idea how long the effect of the laudanum would last, and he wanted to be safely off the premises before it wore off. He crept across the room to the butler's bed and succeeded in obtaining the key from under his pillow without waking him. He unlocked the door as gently as he could, and then, with his boots in one hand and his bundle in the other, he crept on to the landing. Not a sound except the butler's snores was to be heard, but from the room at the head of the stairs, the door of which was open, streamed a light: this was the bedroom of the Fuchsia-bells, and had his case not been so desperate Mark would have hesitated to proceed any further; but the sword of penal servitude which was hanging over his head gave him courage, and reflecting that Mary must be asleep since the laudanum had taken effect on her at prayers, and that if cook were awake he was probably a match for her and certainly would not scruple to silence her in the best way which suggested itself, he went on.

When he got opposite to the door he saw cook, still dressed, sitting by the bed-side, where she had evidently stationed herself to keep guard over him, but drowsiness had overpowered her and she had fallen face forwards on to the bed, and was sleeping soundly. In-

wardly chuckling at his own cleverness, Mark slipped past the door and down the stairs ; but on reaching the back-door he found the key had been taken out of it, so that he could not open it. He went round to the hall-door and it was while he was there that Lion barked, otherwise he would have heard him. But he found it impossible to unbolt the front-door without making a noise, so he decided he must escape by the scullery-window. This was a sash window, close to the ground and protected by shutters, which he easily opened. This done, he threw out his bundle, and then, having put on his boots, vaulted out of it into Captain Raleigh's arms, where he met with a much warmer reception than he anticipated or desired.

As they walked up the hill that night Reuben had seen a dangerous light in the Captain's dark brown eyes, and now and then a twitch or two about his mouth which the blacksmith knew meant that he did not intend Mark's punishment to be slight if he caught him. It was not ; the blows fell thick and fast as Raleigh held his victim by the collar like a dog, and the lithe, strong riding-whip curled round Mark's body and legs till he howled for mercy like a whipped hound.

Reuben heard the cries from the front of the house, and arrived just in time to see Raleigh administer the final lash as he let the howling Mark go.

"There, you scoundrel, that is the most satisfactory piece of work I have done for many a day. So you were running away, were you ? We will wait till he has recovered a little, Reuben, and then we will take him down to the police-station for the night. Meanwhile, I'll go round and wake someone to come and fasten this window, if you will keep guard over that creature," said Captain Raleigh, and his tone of utter contempt cut even the wretched Mark, who was rubbing his smarting sides and legs and dancing with pain. He recovered himself somewhat on finding he was left alone with Reuben, and, resolving to throw himself on the blacksmith's pity as a last resource, began to implore him to let him escape before the Captain returned.

"Let me go, Mr. Foreman ; let me go ; for the love of Heaven, let me go."

"No, Mark, it's better for you to be punished here for a few years than hereafter for ever," said Reuben. Mark felt in his waistcoat pocket and pulled out five sovereigns.

"Mr. Foreman, these are all I have in the world ; you are welcome to them if you'll let me go before the Captain comes back," said Mark, tendering the sovereigns to Reuben most reluctantly ; but his case was he felt a most desperate one.

"What do you take me for, Mark ? Do you think I would do wrong for the sake of five pounds ?" said Reuben scornfully.

"Mr. Foreman, remember how I loved your Janet : for her sake let me go," said Mark.

Reuben had been standing with folded arms, leaning against the door-post, till Mark uttered Janet's name ; when he sprang forward,

picked up the whip Raleigh had thrown on the ground, and seizing the wretched Mark raised it in the air. But he changed his intention and let it fall harmlessly by his side as he exclaimed :

" You good-for-nothing thief ; dare to mention my daughter's name to me again and I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

" Mercy, mercy, Mr. Foreman ; I'll never mention it again as long as I live," whimpered Mark, falling on his knees at Reuben's feet in an agony of fear, for he had no desire to feel the weight of the blacksmith's heavy arm.

" Get up and bear your punishment like a man if you are convicted, as you certainly will be ; so you had better make up your mind to that and give up all hope of escape. The police are on the look-out for you, so you would have no chance if I did let you go. Your wisest plan is to go quietly to the police-station with us when the Captain comes back," said Reuben. And then the opportunity for improving the occasion and endeavouring to save Mark's soul was too good to be lost, so he hastened to seize it.

" Mark Brown, by this time to-morrow night you'll be in gaol, or I am mistaken, for bail will be refused now you have tried to escape ; your cell will be small and not too light ; your bed will be hard, and the bolts will be strong ; but remember, unless you repent of your sins and believe, your prison-cell will be heaven compared to the place you'll be sent to for ever and ever when you die. Remember—" But here Reuben was interrupted by Captain Raleigh, who returned to say he could not make anyone hear.

" They must be very sound sleepers ; I have rung the bell at least a dozen times. But as no one is stirring let us try the back-door ; the servants no doubt sleep this side of the house ; there is a knocker as well as a bell here," said Raleigh, proceeding to knock and ring loudly, but with no result.

" It is very strange ; they must hear all this noise, one would think," he continued, when they had spent five or ten minutes in unavailing knocks.

Mark now began to tremble with a new fear. It was very evident the laudanum was taking effect on the servants ; suppose he had given them an overdose, and one or perhaps more should never wake again, he would be a murderer ! In his abject terror he felt inclined to confess what he had done, but fear of another thrashing prevented him ; future hanging seemed preferable to immediate flogging after his recent experience.

" See, sir, there is a light in this window ; let us throw some gravel up ; that is sure to wake them," said Reuben, pointing to the window of the room the Fuchsia-bells occupied.

Gravel was thrown, but in vain ; the servants slept on ; and after more vain knocking and ringing they went round to the front of the house, Reuben leading Mark lest he should attempt to escape, to see if they could wake the Archdeacon.

"Ask that fellow which is his master's room, Reuben," said Raleigh to the blacksmith, for he could not bring himself to speak to his prisoner.

"That one with the light," said Mark ; upon which Reuben threw some gravel at the window indicated. In a minute it was opened, and the Archdeacon in his night-cap looked out and inquired who was there.

"Only Reuben Foreman and I, Archdeacon ; we caught Mark Brown getting out of the scullery-window, and we have been trying to wake one of the servants to come down and shut it for the last quarter of an hour," said Raleigh.

"But what about Mark ? Has he escaped ?" asked the Archdeacon anxiously.

"No, he is here ; we will take him to the police-station. I am sorry to have disturbed you, but I thought it was not safe to leave the window open. Your servants are sound sleepers indeed," said Raleigh.

"Never mind, I'll shut the window myself. But come to-morrow morning as early as you can, and tell me all about Mark and how you managed to catch him. Don't let him go, Raleigh ; hold him fast for Vera's sake."

"I will, sir, and for your sake and mine too. Good-night. I hope you will sleep well after being disturbed, for you have a trying day before you to-morrow ; I'll be with you early."

"Good-night," said the Archdeacon, and the window closed ; and Mark's hope that his master would try to wake the other servants was gone.

Mark was shortly after duly lodged at the police-station, where he passed a sleepless night—dread lest he should find in the morning that he had added murder to the list of his crimes keeping him awake. A guilty conscience is a wonderful quickener of the imaginative powers ; Mark's imagination was not naturally either quick or powerful, but "conscience which doth make cowards of us all" so sharpened his faculties that he easily pictured to himself the scene the next morning at the Rectory if the butler were found dead in his bed, or the Fuchsia-bells so fast asleep that no human power could wake them. Then he saw the laudanum bottle discovered by the beer cask, where he, fool as he was, had left it. And then he heard the crime of murder fastened on him : he saw himself brought before judge and jury and declared guilty of murder ; he heard the judge pronounce sentence, he imagined himself face to face with death, he mounted the scaffold in imagination, and felt the hangman adjusting the rope round his neck. And then in a white heat he turned on his hard bed and tried to sleep.

Strange that consciousness of sin and fear of the consequences should have the power of producing a train of thought lasting for nearly half an hour in a mind rarely capable of any thought at all

beyond the passing trivial thoughts common to us all, which occupy so much of our time. The truth is, if we analyse our thoughts we shall find the most concentrated thoughts, the most consecutive thoughts, the most sustained thoughts, are those of which our own ego is the pivot round which they turn ; the most thoughtless, the most frivolous, the most uneducated, the most undisciplined minds can generally manage to spend many consecutive minutes in deep thought on this topic of all-absorbing interest to each individual.

But to return to Mark. If he could have known the next morning that at eight o'clock no one was stirring at the Rectory he would have been still more alarmed, but this was the case nevertheless. The servants slept through the alarm set at half-past six in each of their rooms ; Holmes was accustomed to be called an hour later by Mary ; but no Mary came to call her, so she slept on. The Archdeacon had laid awake till six after Raleigh woke him the night before and then fell asleep ; and Mrs. Ryot-Tempest was a late riser and never attempted to stir till Holmes brought her a cup of tea at eight o'clock. On this Tuesday morning, however, eight o'clock struck and no one woke ; the hall-clock chimed the quarter-past and still the household slept. At half-past, however, Mrs. Ryot-Tempest woke, and finding how late it was, rang her bell violently for Holmes. She continued to ring again and again, but no one answered. And then, remembering the trial began at ten, she jumped up, and putting on her slippers and dressing-gown went to see why she was thus neglected.

To her amazement the house was as still as if it were midnight, and looking over the stairs she saw the doors were still shut ; evidently no one was up. Fuming with rage at the laziness of the servants she went into the hall, seized the big dinner-bell and went to the servants' rooms ringing it violently as she walked, and making noise enough to wake the dead. It succeeded in rousing the drugged servants, and in ten minutes' time Holmes stood by her mistress's side full of apologies.

" If you please, ma'am, we all overslept ourselves, and we all have bad headaches, and Mark Brown has run away, and we think he must have put something in the beer to make us sleep last night."

" Don't talk such folly, Holmes ; Mark is up and about his work. He is the only one of you worth his salt. Oversleeping yourselves indeed in this disgraceful style ! Go and tell the others that unless breakfast is on the table as the clock strikes nine, you, every one of you, leave this day month."

Mrs. Ryot-Tempest's servants were afraid of her, so her message had a stimulating effect on them. Breakfast was nearly ready at nine, and finished by half-past, when Captain Raleigh arrived. But that did not deter Mrs. Tempest from administering a good scolding to the household when they assembled for prayers, which on this

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occasion were dispensed with, as the Archdeacon was anxious to get to the police-court in good time. He said nothing to his wife about Mark's frustrated attempt at escape; indeed, breakfast was eaten as most of their meals now were, in almost dead silence, except that to-day Mrs. Ryot-Tempest was so struck with the Archdeacon's pallor that she urged him to make a good breakfast, and suggested he was not well enough to go to the trial.

"I am not well, but I am going," said the Archdeacon, quietly, but in so decided a tone that his wife knew he meant to go if he died in the Court, and he looked so ill that she half-feared he might do so.

A fit of compunction seized her. It was in her power to remove a great part of his anxiety; it was her duty to do so, for had she not vowed to comfort him in trouble? It was also her secret wish, for since the Archdeacon had treated her with this cold civility, she longed to bring him back to her feet. She looked at him again and saw how ill and careworn he looked, and she resolved to tell him something that would prove that Vera was innocent of the robbery. She rose from her seat and went to his end of the table; she was pale and the white hand she laid on his chair trembled, for she was a proud woman, and the confession she was about to make required a great effort.

"Ryot, I have something to say to you," she began, when the door opened and the butler announced:

"If you please, sir, Captain Raleigh is in your study."

At this announcement the demon of jealousy awoke again within her, and removing her hand she went back to her seat with a look of malicious anger on her face, saying as she went:

"It is of no consequence; another time will do."

And that confession was not made.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE NEW WITNESS.

"WHAT an utter fool!"

The speaker was Mrs. Ryot-Tempest; the person she alluded to in these flattering terms was Mark Brown; the occasion was his attempted escape, an account of which Holmes had just given her mistress while dressing her for the trial.

By an effort of self-control such as she seldom exercised, Mrs. Ryot-Tempest had denied herself the pleasure of being present when the Vicar's case was heard, wisely considering it would have been, to say the least, very bad taste on her part to be present: and she was one of those people who are seldom guilty of any breach of good taste. Like many worldly people, she would rather have broken any commandment in the decalogue than sin against the laws of society; and

though she had little or no control over her temper and her tongue, and never crossed her own inclinations in matters which come under any spiritual jurisdiction, she was nevertheless capable of enduring martyrdom rather than be guilty of bad form. It was a case, one of many, of misapplied force.

Her preparations for attending the trial were as elaborate as if she were the criminal : Holmes accompanied her armed with a smelling-bottle, a fan, eau-de-cologne, a flask of wine and some sandwiches ; her dress was plain but handsome, and she wore a thick veil to hide her face, lest she should be betrayed into showing more feeling than was compatible with good breeding.

Two places had been secured for her and her maid, and she rustled into Court just as the magistrates took their seats. Mark Brown was on a platform opposite the bench with a policeman on each side of him, looking as he felt—the most miserable person in the room.

The Archdeacon, Captain Tempest and Captain Raleigh were seated together near the bench. Below them was Mr. Deedes, in apparently excellent spirits ; and by his side sat Freeman, whom, however, no one but Reuben and Mark recognised.

Once again that day Mrs. Ryot-Tempest noticed that her husband looked very pale ; once again her conscience pricked her and she longed to lessen the burden she knew he was carrying ; but she could not get near him now to speak to him had she wished to do so, and the wish was a very fleeting one, dispelled by the sight of Mrs. Canter, whose portly figure and shining face next caught her eye.

"What does that busy, impudent woman mean by coming here to-day ?" thought Mrs. Ryot-Tempest.

Apparently that "busy, impudent woman" meant to observe her critic attentively, for Mrs. Canter's eyes were fixed on Mrs. Ryot-Tempest during the whole proceedings, to the exceeding indignation of that lady, who frowned and fidgeted in vain under the scrutiny to which she was subjected. Indeed, so far were her frowns and her obvious discomfort from checking Mrs. Canter's stare, they seemed to encourage it ; as indeed they did, for the principal object of Mrs. Canter's life that day was a strict observation of every change in Mrs. Ryot-Tempest's countenance. She had come from Marling with the deliberate intention of watching her most closely, and no frowns would deter her from achieving her object. On the contrary, if she annoyed Mrs. Ryot-Tempest by staring at her, all the better : she was delighted to find she could inflict some annoyance upon her, as a slight and wholly inadequate punishment for her conduct to Vera ; so she continued to stare in the coolest and most bare-faced manner. Once or twice Reuben, who was sitting by her side, nudged her and whispered "Mind your stops, Norah ;" but all the heed Mrs. Canter paid was to continue to stare complacently at her adversary and to say aloud :

"It is no use your nudging, Reuben ; I came to look at her and I mean to do it." Whereupon Reuben subsided and left his sister alone, since his reproofs only drew the attention of others to her conduct.

The truth was Mrs. Canter had all along strongly suspected, in the first place that the diamonds were not stolen at all, and in the next that Mrs. Ryot-Tempest knew where they were. These impressions had grown so strong during the past week that they became fixed ideas. She no longer suspected, she felt certain she was right ; and she meant to watch Mrs. Ryot-Tempest narrowly to see if she betrayed during the progress of the case any sign of being guilty of knowing what had become of the diamonds.

"I shall know by her face whether they are really stolen or not ; and once I know that for certain, I'll find out where they are," said Mrs. Canter to herself as Mrs. Ryot-Tempest took her seat.

The proceedings began by Mr. Deedes stating the case for the prosecution, which involved a great deal of repetition of the action brought against Vera the previous week. Briefly stated, his speech amounted to this :

"I am here," he said, "to ask that this Court may commit for trial at the next assizes Mark Brown for perjury committed here last week, when it will be remembered he brought an action against my client, Miss Ryot-Tempest, for wounding him with intent to kill. That case was dismissed, and I asked for process against him for perjury. On that occasion he swore that he surprised Miss Tempest in the act of handing her step-mother's jewel-case from her father's dressing-room window to Reuben Foreman, whom he also swore to have seen in Miss Tempest's company at a time when, as was then proved by several witnesses, he was elsewhere. That last deposition would be sufficient to prove Mark Brown guilty of perjury. I was also able last week to prove to the satisfaction of this Court that Miss Ryot-Tempest was walking in her sleep when the report of the revolver, fired as she states by Mark Brown himself, awoke her. To-day I am happy to say I am in a position to entirely confirm the evidence of Miss Ryot-Tempest read to the Court last week ; and I have the written testimony of thirty-four ladies who were witnesses a few days ago of Miss Ryot-Tempest's somnambulistic powers, which I will now read before I call a new witness who will prove beyond a doubt that Mark Brown was really guilty of the crime he has impudently endeavoured to fasten upon an innocent young lady."

Here Mr. Deedes read the statement of the nuns and also Vera's account of what had happened on the night of the robbery ; and having then briefly stated that the magistrates had dismissed the case against Vera at once and had granted a summons against Mark Brown for perjury, he called William Freeman, who he stated had turned Queen's evidence.

Mrs. Canter saw Mrs. Ryot-Tempest turn very pale when Freeman was put in the box ; but fear rather than frustrated revenge seemed to

be the feeling which ruled her mind, as she had recourse to her smelling-salts.

"My name is William Freeman, and I came down here three weeks or so ago, because I heard there was a good job to be done here," said Freeman.

"What was it?" asked Mr. Deedes.

"I heard there were some valuable diamonds to be had at Woodford Rectory; so I thought they might as well be mine as anyone else's, and I came down after them. I wasn't in a hurry, for I wanted to do the thing neatly and get off to America with the diamonds; but I was rather short of money, so one day I stopped a young lady I afterwards heard was Miss Tempest, and tried to steal her watch. I should have done it too but for her dog, which, if it had not been for her would have killed me. Well, she let me off, like the kind lady she is. She did me a good turn that day, and I have come here to do her a good turn to-day, if I get seven years for it."

Here the witness paused and wiped his face with a red cotton handkerchief; and the Archdeacon, who had heard from Captain Raleigh that Freeman had turned Queen's evidence, leant forward in his seat and strained every nerve to hear what was said, evidently feeling intensely excited.

"You won't get that if you return the jewels," said Mr. Deedes.

"I have not got them to return, sir."

"Didn't you accomplish the job you were so good as to come down here for, then?"

"I did and I didn't. It was like this: I got to know the groom, Mark Brown, and I persuaded him to help me to get the diamonds. I agreed to give him twenty pounds if he would hand the diamonds to me from the dressing-room window on Easter Tuesday."

"And did he agree to do it?"

"Yes. He was to hand me the case with the jewels soon after eleven o'clock at night if his mistress, who was gone to a party, didn't wear them; if she did he was to do it later, after she came home and was asleep; but I was to be under the window by eleven o'clock, and I was to leave the twenty pounds in the old hollow tree by the canal after I had got the diamonds."

"Did you do so?"

"No, because I did not get the diamonds."

"How was that? Did Mark Brown repent of his bargain?"

"I can't say. All I know is, I was outside the window at eleven, and in a mortal fright lest the mastiff should break loose."

"And what happened?"

"Soon after eleven I saw a light in the room, and then Mark opened the window and asked if I was there. I answered yes, and told him to be quick, for I heard wheels, and then he disappeared for a moment or two and returned with the jewel-case, which he dropped out of the window to me as the carriage drove up to the

door. I caught it and ran off, but I heard the revolver fired before I got ten yards from the house."

"What did you do with the jewel-case containing the diamonds?"

"I carried the case down to the hollow tree as fast as I could run. There I forced the lock and found it empty."

Here the Archdeacon, who had been looking dreadfully ill the whole morning, fainted, and had to be carried out of Court by Captain Raleigh and his brother.

Mrs. Canter thought his wife, whom she continued to watch narrowly, would have fainted also, she turned so pale when Freeman swore the casket was empty; but she had recourse to her flask of wine, and by dint of resisting the inclination to faint very strongly she succeeded in retaining her seat.

"She has got them as sure as I am a laundress," said Mrs. Canter in an undertone to Reuben.

"Who has what?" asked Reuben, who had not followed his sister's train of thought.

"Never mind. I have found out what I wanted to know, so I may as well go and see to the master and send them two gentlemen back. Men are no nurses; and he is so ill I wish Miss Vera were here. You stop to the end, Reuben, and come and tell me before I go home," said Mrs. Canter, and then, much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Ryot-Tempest, she left the Court.

"You swear the case was empty when Mark handed it to you?" said Mr. Deedes to Freeman.

"Yes, sir."

"Stand down, then," said Mr. Deedes, who then proceeded to wind up the case for the prosecution in an eloquent speech, in which he held forth largely on the cruel wrong done to his client Miss Vera Tempest by the impudent accusation brought against her by Mark Brown, which he trusted was now entirely refuted by the evidence of the last witness. He so carried the Court and the spectators with him that if judgment could have been given at once there is no doubt Mark would have been then and there committed for trial on the charge of perjury; but his lawyer had first to be heard for the defence.

Mr. Jones now rose, and in a shrewd, clever speech, in which he spared no one's feelings, he maintained that there was no case at all against his client. The only evidence against him was that of a man who, by his own confession, was a thief and a burglar, whose word could not be taken against that of an old, valued, trusted servant like Mark Brown. Had Freeman produced the diamonds, some weight might have been attached to his evidence. The diamonds were kept in the jewel-case; the jewel-case was found, but the diamonds were missing; someone had stolen them. The question was, who? If Freeman, then he had committed perjury, and so vitiated the rest of his evidence. If not Freeman, then who had

stolen them? Here Mr. Jones made an impressive pause, and then proceeded. Clearly only one person could have done so ; that person knew where the diamonds were kept ; was found in the room in which they were on the night of the robbery after everyone had gone to bed, and had run away from her home the next day, and had, as far as he knew, not been heard of since. There never had been any doubt in his mind as to who was the culprit. From the very first the evidence had pointed to one person. As for the sleep-walking defence, a lamer was never invented ; he certainly did not believe one word of it, and he was surprised that anyone should. It was clear that this suspicion was shared by others, or why had the Archdeacon fainted when Freeman swore the jewel-case was empty? Once more he argued there was no case against his client ; and he demanded either that the case should be dismissed at once, or that it should be remanded until the diamonds were found. If they were found where he suspected them to be, then the whole case against Mark Brown fell to the ground ; and he should appeal to another Court against the judgment in the first case.

Here the magistrates, who were evidently much puzzled what to do, adjourned to another room for luncheon, trusting that sandwiches and sherry would clear their judgment. Captain Raleigh and Captain Tempest, both of whom were evidently in a state of suppressed fury with Mr. Jones, went back to the Rectory to see how the Archdeacon was, and Mr. Deedes retired to consider his final speech to be given when the magistrates returned to the bench. Mrs. Ryot-Tempest remained in the Court, chiefly because she was afraid to go home lest she should come in contact with Mrs. Canter, whom she knew to be in attendance on the Archdeacon. Reuben went outside and discussed the case with various spectators, all of whom, though sympathising with Vera and convinced of her innocence, knowing her as they had done from a child, were agreed that Freeman's evidence had done her more harm than good ; since his declaration that the jewel-case was empty had given Mark's lawyer such a golden opportunity for bringing forward all the evidence which pointed to Vera as the culprit.

Even Mr. Deedes, certain as he was of Vera's innocence, inwardly owned the case was going terribly against them ; and he half wished he had not persuaded the Archdeacon to bring this action against Mark Brown, but had let the matter end with the first case when Vera was pronounced innocent of wounding Mark.

"If we could only get a clue to where the diamonds are," he muttered to himself as he made some brief note for his speech.

Meanwhile Captain Raleigh and Captain Tempest had been to the Rectory and learnt from Mrs. Canter that the Archdeacon was better ; but he had had a very bad attack and the doctor had given strict orders he was to see no one but herself that day, and the less he was told about the trial the better.

"There is no doubt about that, for it is going about as badly as it can," said Raleigh gloomily.

"You don't mean it, sir? Law, what a fool that bench is; I just wish I was sitting upon it," said Mrs. Canter.

"You'd sit upon the magistrates if you were, Norah, and you are no light weight; you'd soon crush them; but it is no joking matter. If we don't find those diamonds, it will be a bad job for Vera," said Captain Tempest.

"Then, gentlemen, I'll find them if I ransack the house from garret to basement, for they are in this house as sure as I am a widow. I suspected it all along, but from what I have seen of Mrs. Ryot-Tempest's face and manners to-day I am certain of it."

"Come, Raleigh, we must be off. I cannot believe it, Norah. My belief is that Mark Brown has them, and hid them up on his way to the doctor's to have his arm dressed; but we must look sharp. They begin again at two," said Captain Tempest.

The two gentlemen went off at a brisk walk, leaving Mrs. Canter deep in thought as she mechanically went upstairs to the Archdeacon. On arriving at the police-court they met Mr. Deedes just going to his place, looking very grave, and as if he had just braced himself up, as indeed he had, to make a great effort on behalf of Vera.

"Will they commit him, do you think, Deedes?" asked Captain Raleigh.

"I doubt it. They know and believe Miss Tempest is innocent; but the evidence is, as that scamp's lawyer has proved, more against her than before. However, we must not despair; I'll do my best, though I may have to keep you here half the afternoon before I finish my final speech."

Shortly after this the magistrates came into Court and the proceedings were resumed by Mr. Deedes rising, amidst a slight rustling and hustling and settling-down of the audience. He waited calmly till this had subsided, and was just about to address the Court when a note was handed to him; which he at once opened and read. His face changed as he read it, and, as soon appeared, his course of action changed also. He turned to Captain Raleigh and smiled triumphantly at him; he gave a scrutinising glance at Mrs. Ryot-Tempest; then he drew himself up, turned to the bench and made the following speech:

"Gentlemen, I was prepared to have inflicted a long speech on the Court in answer to that of Mr. Jones, but the letter I have just received has decided me to change my mind—a privilege, as a rule, only accorded to the gentler sex, but which I trust will on this occasion be granted to me. That letter contains some very important information, of such a nature as to induce me to ask that this case may be adjourned for a week; at the expiration of which I hope to lay such startling evidence before the bench as will induce them to commit the

accused for trial without hesitation. As Mr. Jones has also asked for a remand, I trust the bench will grant my request. I have only to add that since Mark Brown endeavoured to escape last night, I hope he will not be admitted to bail."

There was a buzz of excitement in the Court as Mr. Deedes sat down; a buzz which was speedily quelled by a cry of "Silence." Mark Brown had turned so pale and trembled so that he had to be accommodated with a chair; Mrs. Ryot-Tempest was evidently also much moved, for she had seen that the bearer of the note to Mr. Deedes was Mary, the Rectory parlour-maid; and she had a very shrewd idea of its contents, guessing as she did that it came either from her husband or Mrs. Canter, whom she knew to be with him. Mr. Jones looked furious as he felt; Freeman chuckled audibly, though he had no idea what the news was; and the rest of the spectators were moved by an intense curiosity, which was however not destined to be gratified. Captain Raleigh and Captain Tempest were as much amazed as everyone else, but their astonishment was only increased when Mr. Deedes handed them the letter he had just read.

It was from Mrs. Canter, and was brief and to the point.

"Get a remand; I have found the diamonds.

"NORAH CANTER."

"Norah is humbugging Deedes; she had no more notion where the diamonds were a quarter-of-an-hour ago than you or I," whispered Captain Tempest to Raleigh.

"I don't think so; she dare not."

"Dare not? My dear fellow, you don't know Norah; she dare do a great deal more than becomes a man or a woman either."

"Perhaps; but I have an idea this is not a hoax; I believe Norah is right. Our friend over there," nodding at Mrs. Ryot-Tempest, "is quite capable of having the diamonds and yet seeing Vera accused of stealing them."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the presiding magistrate, who informed the Court that the case would be remanded for a week and that Mark Brown would not be admitted to bail. Freeman, however, would, if he could find sureties.

Captain Raleigh then volunteered to find bail for Freeman, and Mark Brown was removed in custody. The spectators withdrew, breaking up into groups outside, where they discussed the new turn the case had taken. And Reuben Foreman went straight to the Rectory to inform Mrs. Canter of the decision, quite unconscious that she was the authoress of the letter which had so altered the course of action pursued by Mr. Deedes.

(To be concluded.)

RICE AND SLIPPERS.

Rice and slippers, slippers and rice !
 Quaint old symbols of all that's nice
 In a world made up of sugar and spice,
 With a honeymoon always shining ;
 A world where the birds keep house by twos,
 And the ringdove calls and the stockdove coos,
 And maids are many, and men may choose,
 And never shall love go pining.

For the rice shall be shed and the shoes be thrown,
 When the bridegroom makes the bride his own,
 He and she in the world alone,
 Though many a man came wooing ;
 He and she, and no other beside,
 Though the ways are long and the world is wide,
 The proudest groom and the prettiest bride
 That ever went billing and cooing.

Slippers and rice for an omen meet,
 Fling them out in the open street,
 High over heads and low under feet,
 Precious beyond all posies ;
 Glad as the song that greets the day
 When wedded lovers are whirled away
 For an everlasting month of May,
 Or a whole round year of roses.

Say, is she fair, the wife of an hour ?
 Then fairer was never the fairest flower,
 Lily or rose, in a maiden's bower,
 Blush-white on a summer morning :
 Or say, is she dark ? Then never yet
 Was southern beauty with eyes of jet,
 Or dusk-pale syren, or dark brunette,
 So lovely beyond adorning.

Is she rich ? does she bring a dower of gold ?
 Then good is the treasure to have and to hold
 Her lover will learn to be twice as bold
 With fortune at hand to aid him :
 Is she poor, in all but her own fair worth ?
 Then that is the richest dower on earth,
 And her lover will laugh at wealth and birth
 When he owns it was *she* who made him.

It is well, all well, whatever she be,
 A queen to her lord and to none but he—
 But the sweetest sight in the world to see
 Is a bride in her bridal beauty ;
 And he, he too, is a noble sight,
 The groom as gallant as belted knight,
 Who wins a prize in the world's despite
 By his vows of love and duty.

GEORGE COTTERELL.

BLOATERS AND HAM-CURED.

NO ONE can fail to associate the quaint old town of Yarmouth with the title of this article.

Yarmouth Bloaters are known everywhere, and although "Ham-cured" as applied to herrings is a name of recent date, it respects merely a new process in curing which is rapidly displacing the old-fashioned Red Herrings for which Yarmouth was long famous.

Built upon a sand-bank at the mouth of three fine rivers, the confluence of which forms a natural harbour where fishing-boats can lie in security and unload, while the rivers themselves afford a ready means for distributing throughout the eastern counties the produce of the sea, there seems little doubt that this town had its origin as a fishing station. At how early a period it became associated with the particular industry which is its staple trade at the present time it is hard to say. The catching of herrings and dealing in fresh herrings must, of course, have preceded the curing of them; but, from the nature of the fish and the difficulty of disposing of any large quantities while good, we should imagine that there was no long interval between them.

There is evidence in Doomsday Book and elsewhere that at the time of the Norman Conquest Yarmouth was a fishing port of some considerable extent, and that foreign fishermen resorted to the Coast, attracted by the rich bank of herrings which, it would appear, were as abundant then as now.

At Yarmouth, for several hundred years, from the time of William the Norman, a "free fair" was held annually every autumn for six weeks, for the selling and buying of fish. In the local histories by Manship, Palmer and others will be found many curious customs that were in use on these occasions.

Whether the invention of this process of curing herrings originated with the Dutch or with our own countrymen is an open question; both undoubtedly have been benefited by the discovery.

The herring fisheries have long proved a mine of wealth for both Dutch and English. The Dutch for many years, by dint of greater energy and better appliances, reaped the larger portion of that prolific harvest of the sea which lies between their coast and our own; but of late their interest has declined, while, on the other hand, our own has greatly increased.

It is hardly possible to over-estimate the value of our herring fisheries. They are the most extensive of all the industries connected with the sea. Herrings give employment to more boats, more men, more capital, and they supply a larger amount of good wholesome food than all other sorts of fish that find their way to the English

markets : we are hardly wrong in saying that all other sorts of fish put together.

Taking our island round, there are but few weeks in the year during which herrings are not caught somewhere. We mean, of course, fish in season—prime, full fish. In the north of Scotland the season begins about the middle of July. Off the Yorkshire coast, at Whitby and Scarborough, herrings are at their prime from August to September. The Yarmouth and Lowestoft fishing extends through October and November to the middle of December. The South Foreland season succeeds these ; and up to the end of the year herrings are taken in Plymouth Sound.

It is difficult to give any correct information as to the natural history of such fish as the herrings, which always inhabit the sea.

Of the salmon and others that pass their time in periodical changes from salt water to fresh, more accurate knowledge can be obtained. It is easy to capture a few specimens and mark them in the rivers they frequent, and to note the alteration in growth, weight and other particulars when recaptured at the period of their return.

But with herrings, from their extraordinary abundance, as well as from the reason just assigned, such means of information cannot be had. Still, close observation teaches something.

It was long supposed that herrings were migratory ; that from the north of Scotland the shoals made their way along the eastern coast to the extreme south. This notion is now altogether discarded. The long period occupied by the herring fisheries between these two extremes militates against it. There is an interval of six months between the time of the Scotch and the Plymouth fishing, and the fish that are taken all along the coast in this interval, out of season, are found to be of different stages of development off the different fishing stations.

Moreover, there are peculiarities in the full-grown fish of these different stations that can only be accounted for by assuming that they are spawned there and reared on their own feeding grounds. Ask any man in Yarmouth "well up" with herrings, either as a buyer or a seller, and he will tell you at a glance whether the lot of fish before him were caught off the Scotch or the Yorkshire or the Norfolk coast.

Even when these three sorts of herrings are cured in the same way there is a marked difference in them : the flesh of the latter is more delicate and the bones less coarse than in either of the two former. Even we ourselves, from long experience of them as articles of food of almost daily consumption, can with tolerable accuracy tell Yarmouth bloaters from all others, though we should hesitate to give an opinion if the herrings were high-dried, or what is now called "ham-cured."

Having resided in the neighbourhood for many years, it is of

course with the Yarmouth fishing and with the Yarmouth modes of curing that we are best acquainted, and consequently to these our remarks will mainly have reference.

With us there are three sorts of herrings that are cured and sold under the general name of bloaters. They are locally known as spring herrings, midsummer herrings, and 'long-shores, all of them being lightly cured as distinguished from the high-dried or ham-cured. The two former have small claim to be considered bloaters at all, for the fish are deficient in size and fatness. It is among the 'long-shores that early bloaters are found to satisfy the epicure.

During the months of March and April these so-called spring herrings are taken in immense quantities, but they are immature and tasteless—not worth eating. Some of the best are sold as fresh herrings, and some are cured. They fetch a very small price either way, often not more than fourpence or sixpence a hundred, and the great bulk of the fish caught is worthless except for manure. Tons upon tons of these spring herrings are annually carted upon the land.

It is a crying shame that the waste should be permitted to go on. Sooner or later its injurious effects upon the herring fishery must be seen. Notwithstanding boat-owners and men are against it, an Act of Parliament is urgently required to enforce a "close time," as in Scotland, and to put a stop to this wanton destruction of food. These same spring herrings, now so worthless, if left alone on their feeding ground for two months' longer growth might be caught as midsummer herrings greatly improved in value; or still better as 'longshores; or if they escaped capture they would serve at spawning time in November to replenish the stock of herrings for another year.

It is a sad pity that something is not done and that too without further delay. While fish swarm as they now do in these waters, whether they are immature or not, men and nets are always ready to take them. It is not improbable that this wanton slaughter of the innocents may one day from some unforeseen cause avenge itself.

By midsummer our herrings are much improved in size and quality. But the "take" is generally disappointing, owing to the easy capture and immense destruction of spring herrings. The midsummer herrings, though fat and well flavoured, have as yet no roes. They make good bloaters, but the weather being usually warm at this time, to have them in perfection they should be cooked and eaten a few hours after they are cured.

The "longshores," so called from being caught within a short distance of the shore, and being from this cause taken quite fresh to the curing-houses, are much appreciated. The fish here have increased in size from two or three weeks' longer feeding and have begun to develop their roes; from this time onwards to the middle of November, bloaters are to be bought; and most delicious they are.

The earliest in the year are salted only for a few hours—ten or twelve at a time—and being hung up in smoke in the evening, they are ready for sale the next morning; but from being so lightly cured they will not keep above a day.

As the season advances and the fish increase in size they take longer in the curing and are allowed to keep three days; but they are never so good as when first taken down from the racks in the smoking-houses. They are packed in boxes holding a dozen or more to be sent away. They should be unpacked as soon as they arrive and hung up not touching each other.

During the bloater season, it is only the best fish that are so cured. Large quantities which are not deemed the right sort for this process are packed as fresh as possible in barrels—layers of herrings neatly arranged with layers of salt between them—about six hundred to eight hundred in a barrel, to the weight of two cwt., and half barrels in the same proportion; these are shipped to the Mediterranean and other parts. These barrelled herrings have always been in great demand in Roman Catholic countries, and so important has been this trade to the Yarmouth and Lowestoft fishermen that a favourite toast of theirs has long been:—

“Here’s a health to his holiness the Pope, with his triple crown,
With nine dollars each for each cask in the town.”

Herrings, also, that have been salted at sea for some days and are not suited for bloaters are left in the smoking-houses for several days until they assume a light golden colour, and thus treated they are sold as high dried and allowed to keep a week or a fortnight or even more; but they are unsatisfactory, the fish being so often tainted by being kept too long at sea before being cured, and they are seldom appreciated by those who know what good herrings ought to be.

Of the class of “high dried,” there is nothing equal to the “ham-cured.”

This mode of curing, though of recent date, is rapidly displacing all others for winter or keeping herrings. It is adopted by all the best curing-houses, and though there are some that greatly surpass others in carrying out the process, it is everywhere a great improvement upon the old high dried and red herrings with which we were once so familiar.

Pork-hams, as we all know, vary in quality and flavour according to the recipes made use of in curing them, and so it is with “ham-cured” herrings. The process is not uniform. Though there is one general recipe—the fish being cured with sugar as well as salt—the process varies somewhat in the different curing-houses. In some cases the herrings are cured with the addition of a certain quantity of coarse brown sugar mixed with the salt in which they lie in heaps previous to smoking; in others each herring is rubbed with a mixture of salt, sugar, and a little pepper before smoking.

begins. According to circumstances the salting occupies from eight to ten days, and the smoking a fortnight, three weeks, and even more. First-rate ham-cured herrings are not often to be bought before the first week in December. If properly cured they will keep good till the Midsummer herrings come in the following year.

It may serve to convey some idea of the extent to which this industry of the sea is carried on at Yarmouth to mention that from four hundred to five hundred boats are engaged in it, and that these are supplemented by about half as many more Scotch boats which join our fishing when their own season is over. These Yarmouth boats are of different sizes: from the one-masted craft with three or four men in them that engage in the 'longshore fishing, to the largest-sized luggers carrying three masts and a bowsprit, varying from thirty to fifty tons, and having a crew of twelve hands each.

These large luggers in the full season take out one hundred and eleven herring nets, eighteen yards long by thirty-two feet deep, covering upwards of a mile in extent. They have also on board from eight to ten tons of salt. The value of each lugger with its equipment is estimated at about £1,000. They look to make, at any rate, two voyages a week, and are careful, if possible, to come into port every Sunday.

The take of herrings, as may be expected, varies very greatly. The boat-loads are reckoned by the "lasts" of twenty "swills," each containing five hundred herrings—long hundreds reckoned Yarmouth fashion—of which we shall speak presently—so that thirteen thousand fish go to every last.

From the many boats engaged in this industry, and the many voyages made by each boat, the yearly average of herrings caught, if it could be accurately noted, must be enormous.

The largest "take" on record by any one boat is, we believe, that of the "New Lily"—a lugger belonging to Messrs. Nockolds, which was towed into harbour with a cargo of twenty-five lasts: numbering, according to the above reckoning, three-hundred-and-twenty-five thousand fish. An account of this extraordinary take was given at the time by Dr. Norman, of Yarmouth, in "Land and Water."

The method of counting adopted by the Yarmouth men and above alluded to is somewhat original. It is done by "long" hundreds—not one hundred and twenty to the hundred, as is usual; but one hundred and thirty-two, and the reckoning is by four instead of by five and ten. While at sea, the herrings are stowed away in the sides and hold of the vessels—anywhere in short, if needs be, and as soon as the boats come into harbour the counting begins.

For this purpose large pannier-shaped wicker baskets, not unlike a London baker's basket, are used. These are locally called "Swills." They will hold five hundred herrings each, "long reckoning." The counters take from the heap in the vessel two herrings in each hand; then, putting their two hands together, they throw all

four fish into the swills, counting as they go on according to the fisherman's arithmetic by "warps," thus—

Four herrings make a warp.
Thirty-three warps make a hundred.

By this most liberal mode of reckoning it will be seen that one hundred and thirty-two fish go to the "long hundred." The swills, when filled, are taken into the fish market—a large covered building of several hundred feet running along the side of the quay quite handy for the boats—here they are sold by auction at so much the last by one of the many salesmen, who have their offices at the back of the building; or if the owners of the boats are curers also, the fish are at once taken off to their curing-houses in different parts of the town.

As the reader may know from personal experience—or, if not, he may very readily imagine—the Yarmouth of the present day is a very different place from the Yarmouth with which we first became acquainted something like forty years ago. There was then no magnificent esplanade, there were no long terraces of houses facing the sea, no piers, only the "old jetty," as it is called, not half as long as at present, for it has been twice lengthened within our memory.

And—most important of all things in changing the character of the place—there was no fish market by the harbour side; but all the boats landed and sold their cargoes on the open beach. And an animating sight it was.

We have many times stood upon the old jetty in the height of the season during October and November, and watched the busy scene. As soon as a fishing lugger appeared in the roads, the hardy beachmen to whom the right belonged pushed off their heavy ferry boats to bring the fish ashore, and a rough time they often had of it battling with the breakers. The herrings then, as now, were counted into swills—empty swills being taken out by the ferry boats and full ones returned. These, when landed, were arranged by scores (twenty swills making a last), and sold as soon as landed by Dutch auction.

The last ferry boat on shore, the lugger was off again. A bell rang on the beach—the licensed salesman took his place—moving from last to last—the buyers made their bids, and in a very few minutes the whole lugger's cargo changed hands at prices varying from £8 up to £18—£20 the last, and sometimes more. As each lot was sold, the swills were packed upon the owner's cart, and driven in hot haste to the curing houses in the town.

It may be mentioned that the wood principally used in smoking herrings is oak billet. A billet is generally understood to mean a small stick or log of wood; but in Yarmouth the word, as the "long hundred," has a local meaning. Each single billet is a piece of peeled oak; a branch three feet four inches long, and having a

girth of four inches. The wood must be cut this length, though the thickness may vary so as to include three, four, five and even more billets in the same pieces. They are all cut, measured and marked before being landed on the quay, and any attempt at false measurement, we have been told, subjects the lot to forfeiture. Ash billet is much prized for smoking bloaters; but ash is now very scarce in our eastern counties.

To how many men and boys this industry of the sea gives employment it is difficult to say. Yarmouth with its fifty thousand inhabitants cannot and does not supply the whole of them, for all the neighbouring villages contribute hands during the fishing season, and a capital opening it is for young lads. It costs nothing for their living while at sea, and in most cases, over and above a small sum as wages, all hands on board have an interest in the boats to which they belong. The spring and summer fishing over, these lads are at home for harvest and off to sea again for the autumn herrings. In this way they can make three harvests, and, following this on for three or four years, they have money enough in hand to furnish a cottage, if they are contented to settle down and marry; or to emigrate, as several from this part have lately done, to Canada and elsewhere, under most favourable circumstances, if so inclined.

In addition to the men and lads, there are hundreds of women and girls who find employment also. Some in making and mending nets, others in the curing houses, preparing and spitting the herrings, and others at the fish wharves, engaged in washing and sorting the fish. It was from this latter class that several were selected, some time ago, to pay a visit to the "Fisheries" in London, where they attracted much admiration. They are often to be seen in parties on their way to the wharves—dressed gaily in costume—often bareheaded and bare-armed, generally good-looking, always apparently good-tempered, high-spirited and healthy—fine specimens of their sex, meet mothers of a hardy race of British seamen.

What Speed said about the "unsavoury" state of the town in his day and the strictures of Pope and Crabbe at a later period, if they were ever true, of Yarmouth they are not so now.

The cleanliness and the morality of the place will bear comparison with any other seaport of equal population anywhere. The Church and church-workers have done great things for Yarmouth. There is no city or town in England better cared for. There are charities to meet every want of suffering humanity. The accidents, physical and moral, incident to a seafaring population are most carefully provided for. He who follows the fishing on this fish-abounding coast need never want. Curing goes on and herrings can be had all the year round. To us who live within easy range of the great centre of the herring trade, they form a very important item in our daily food supply. By rich and poor alike they are appreciated. During autumn, in the height of the season, the very air is scented with these savoury

"ham-cured" fish as one drives through the different villages near the coast, and a most appetising smell it is.

Enter a cottage in any village on the eastern coast about noon-time or supper-time, and you are pretty sure to see two or three good looking herrings smoking hot on a dish on the table, and one or two more on the gridiron "getting ready"—a capital meal! and a boon indeed to the labourer and his family.

The villages round Yarmouth are almost daily visited by men with carts and hand-barrows offering cured fish for sale. They are generally sharp traders and fond of bargaining, making a great difference in selling to rich and poor. Not infrequently, in cottages one or two herrings are cooked in a Dutch-oven before the fire, with a thick slice of bread underneath, so that none of the juices of the fish are lost. In this way they are eaten untouched by anything but the fingers. This, though not a very refined, is nevertheless a very favourite way with the cottagers of enjoying these fish. At any rate, they all seem thoroughly to understand how best to cook them.

Bloaters are split open, cleaned, the head and bones carefully removed, then placed on a gridiron over a clear fire, turned occasionally: but kept mostly with the skin side on the fire till done.

Ham cured are not split open but cooked whole. They must be frequently turned, and are done quite enough when they are well heated through; if dried up by the fire they are spoiled. At any rate, this is the way we Norfolk folk prefer to have them cooked.

The fishing season ends the first or second week in December. The Scotch boats make up a week or two earlier. It is a pretty sight—we have often witnessed it—to see the whole Scotch fleet sail out of Gorleston harbour, many anxious eyes watching them till the last boat is lost to view in "the arrowy distance," on their way north.

Next comes the parting on the Norfolk platforms, where many bright eyes are tearful, as the Norfolk lads bid farewell to their sweethearts on their return to their village homes until next season's fishing begins. Beneficial in many respects is this interchange of employment between land and sea. The farmers often grumble at it, but they are no losers, for the men are out of their pay when they are least wanted for farm work. The service has its risks, but it has its excitement, which serves to develop energies that too often slumber when life, as with the rustics, runs on solely in one groove.

We are always glad to see the men and lads at home again, and it is always a matter of thankfulness when the season ends without any of those sad casualties which must now and then occur, leaving wives widows, and children fatherless!

HENRY P. DUNSTER, M.A.

AUNT AND NIECE.

THE air was filled with the scent of roses which floated in at the open French window of a pretty drawing-room where two persons were sitting. One was a fine soldierly-looking man, verging on fifty, the other a woman, ten or twelve years younger than himself. She was very handsome, though with the kind of beauty that had probably not made her a pretty girl. He, with his hat and stick in his hand, was leaning forward in his chair, and observing her with a good deal of earnestness and a touch of embarrassment which she, intent upon a piece of church embroidery, neither shared nor noticed. General Durnsford and Miss Warburton were friends of such long standing that moments of embarrassment between them were unexpected.

"Well," she said lightly, becoming conscious of a lengthened silence, "I thought you had come to say something important—why don't you say it?"

"I will," he answered. "I have come to ask you to be my wife."

She dropped her work with a genuine start, and turned her face to him with a look of amazement. Then, recovering herself, she said with a smile :

"Are you joking?"

"Joking! I never was more serious."

"I can't believe it. It is incredible. You can't possibly mean that you want to marry me."

"If I did not mean it I should not say it," he answered coolly. Now the ice was broken, his embarrassment had vanished.

"I am very sorry; for of course it is out of the question," she said, after a moment's pause.

He looked momentarily discomfited, but replied with equanimity :

"Why out of the question?"

"Because it is."

"Do you think," he asked, with a half-smile, "that you are not good enough for me?"

"I think myself *quite* good enough for you, but I can't believe that you think me good enough."

"Do you suppose I would want to marry you if I didn't think it?"

"Yes. It is precisely what I do suppose. You would prefer to feel yourself comfortably superior to your wife."

He reddened with anger.

"It is generally considered the highest compliment a man can pay a woman to ask her to be his wife. You don't appear to be of that opinion."

"It depends on the man—and the woman," she said, and then added, in a soothing tone: "I don't mean to be ungrateful. I fully appreciate the compliment you have paid me, and understand the special value of it as coming from you; but I think if you consider the matter you will acknowledge yourself mistaken in so complimenting me. Indeed, in my opinion, you will make a mistake in marrying at all."

"What do you mean?" he interrupted. But she smiled, and went on:

"And you would make a terrible mistake in marrying me. However, as that is a blunder you cannot fall into without my assistance, you will be saved from it."

"I imagine I am competent to choose the right wife for myself," he said, loftily.

"I doubt if any man is competent to do that, and that you are not you have proved by choosing me. My dear General, I couldn't make you happy."

"Pardon me, you could."

"At any rate you couldn't make me happy; and though that is doubtless a minor matter to you, it is one of serious importance to me."

General Durnsford at this point lost his temper, and his wits.

"I never was answered in such a way by any woman," he cried.

"Dear me! How did the other women answer? and how many were there?"

He answered by springing from his chair and turning to the door.

But she quickly laid her hand upon his arm.

"Now don't be cross, and I will cease to be flippant. You know I like you. If I did not like you so much, I think I should marry you to escape the reproach of being an old maid. But it would not be fair."

"Am I not the best judge of that?"

"No, you are not. I am really entirely unsuited to you. We have not an idea in common."

"That is as it should be. A husband and wife are all the better for being totally dissimilar."

"Yes, as the treble and bass of a piece of music are dissimilar. They should be set in one key."

"And how do you know we are not?"

"By what is called a woman's intuition. No, seriously, General, if you are bent on marrying, you must choose either a clever, managing woman, who will turn you round her finger, or a meek, clinging little person, who will make it an article of faith that you are the best and wisest man in the world."

"In short, a tyrant or a slave," he suggested ironically.

"You put it exactly," she returned mischievously. "I should be

neither. I should have neither the tact nor the courage to combat your faults, nor the meekness to submit to them, nor the confidence to be blind to them. And you would discover my faults in a week, and never cease to feel that you had been deceived in me. In short, we should both be miserable."

"Your very candid exposition has entirely convinced me," he said stiffly. "Good-bye."

"Now, don't be angry," she entreated. "Don't you see that I value you too much as a friend to risk losing your friendship by converting you into a husband?"

He looked at her irresolutely.

"You run no risk," he began, and paused as the sound of voices came through the window.

"Here's the proper person for you to marry," Miss Warburton said, as a young girl came towards the window with a basket of roses in her hand. "Poor Harold Lane already considers you a dangerous rival."

The girl was about seventeen, fair-haired and blue-eyed, and very lovely, with that soft, infantile beauty which often conceals the germ of a character best described as "difficult."

When she saw the pair at the window her face lit up with naïve delight, and quickening her pace she held out her hand to General Durnsford with a sweet, shy smile.

"What have you done with Mr. Lane?" asked Miss Warburton.

The smile gave place to a pettish grimace.

"I don't know where he's gone. He's so stupid and tiresome to-day."

General Durnsford, who was leaning against the window, regarding her with interest and approval, laughed at this.

"Why, Miss Daisy," he said, "what has he been doing?"

"He wanted me to pin a rose in his coat," returned Daisy.

At this moment the subject of the discussion appeared on the scene. He was a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with no pretensions to good looks, but with a countenance expressive of much good sense and good temper, though at this moment it wore a frown which deepened at sight of General Durnsford, and the greeting he gave him was the opposite of that which Daisy had given.

For some moments a desultory conversation was carried on, in which Daisy alone bore a perfectly easy part, and then General Durnsford said :

"Well, I must go. Miss Daisy, will you not give me one of those lovely roses to take away with me?"

Daisy smiled and blushed, and murmured a shy yes, while she turned over the contents of her basket.

"This is the prettiest," she said, holding out to him a delicate yellow rosebud.

"Won't you pin it in for me?" he asked, with a faintly tender

inflection in his voice, and a glance at Miss Warburton, which she refused to meet. Harold scowled, and Daisy with her whole childish heart in her eyes did as she was asked.

"Oh, auntie," she said to Miss Warburton, when the two gentlemen had departed, "how nice General Durnsford is. I do think he is the most charming man I ever met."

"You have had such a large experience," returned her aunt drily. "But I can tell you, my dear child, that Harold Lane is worth three dozen of General Durnsford. He is as true-hearted a man as you ever have met, or ever will meet."

"He a man," said Daisy scornfully; "I call him a boy."

Miss Warburton made no reply, but when her niece had gone away to put the roses into water, she remained idly by the window murmuring :

"The most charming, charming man she ever met. Poor, foolish child! And yet—have I been much less foolish?"

She stifled a sigh, and went resolutely back to her embroidery.

Two days later the General re-appeared at Willow Cottage. He was looking unusually spruce and brushed up, and carried in his hand a basket of hot-house flowers.

"I have not come to see you," he said coolly to Miss Warburton. "I have come to see Miss Daisy."

"Daisy," called Miss Warburton, without a change of expression on her face.

At the summons, Daisy emerged from an inner room, looking the very embodiment of the flower whose name she bore, in a pink cotton gown, and a muslin, lace-trimmed apron. A smile dimpled over her pretty face when she saw the visitor.

"Miss Daisy," General Durnsford began, "a friend of mine who has just gone to India sent me a pet pony to take care of during his absence. I want you to help me to take care of him by riding him."

"Oh!" cried Daisy, flushing with pleasure. And then she added mournfully: "But I can't ride."

"You are young enough to learn," replied General Durnsford, smiling.

"I should love it," said Daisy.

"It is a very handsome pony, quite accustomed to carry a lady, and very quiet. If you will trust yourself to my teaching, I'm sure I shall soon make an accomplished horsewoman of you."

"But I haven't a riding habit," murmured Daisy.

Miss Warburton here observed that she could find a skirt that would do for the present.

"And I thought," General Durnsford continued, turning to Miss Warburton, "that you would accompany us in your little pony cart to see that I take proper care of your niece."

Miss Warburton acquiesced in this arrangement without comment, and General Durnsford turned once more to Daisy.

"Miss Daisy," he said, "in return for the flower you gave me yesterday, I have brought you some from my houses."

He put the basket in her hands as he spoke.

Again Daisy could only say "Oh." But her eloquent eyes made up for all verbal deficiencies. After settling that the first ride was to take place the following morning, the General went away.

"I do think he is too fascinating," said Daisy as soon as he was out of the room, bending lovingly over her flowers.

"He is a very silly old man," said Miss Warburton sharply.

"How funny Aunt Adelaide is," murmured Daisy to herself. "She seems quite annoyed at General Durnsford's being so nice to me. I wonder—but oh no. She is too old to think of being jealous," and the girl went off into chuckles of laughter at the mere idea.

Nevertheless, it was an article of belief among Miss Warburton's friends that any time during the last fifteen years she would have married General Durnsford if he had asked her. And it was a source of unfailing wonder to them why he never had asked her. They were great friends; they were admirably suited to each other in age, position and tastes, and there was no evidence that either of them wanted to marry anybody else. However, the gossips gossiped thus unheeded, and the platonic friendship between the much-discussed pair flowed on in apparently unruffled smoothness until General Durnsford, after silently considering the matter for fifteen years, made up his mind to marry Miss Warburton. Miss Warburton, as has been seen, refused him. So proud a woman could not have done otherwise.

Daisy's first riding lesson was a great success, and soon became a daily institution. The General proved to be a model riding-master, careful, gentle, strict, and deeply interested in the progress of his pupil. Miss Warburton drove obediently along bridle paths, and across fields, and wherever else the General bade her, and looked on in silence at the little comedy which was being played before her, a comedy in which one player was so intensely in earnest, and the other—was he in earnest or not?

Miss Warburton could not decide.

But there was one person to whom this new aspect of affairs was no comedy, but a drama verging on the tragic.

Harold Lane was furious. He took to calling every day at Willow Cottage, but Daisy would hardly speak to him. She had nearly given up playing lawn-tennis. She was too tired after riding, she said, and it was a stupid game. Sitting still under the trees and talking was a much pleasanter way of spending a summer afternoon. So she sat still and talked to the General, while Harold hovered about torn with anger and jealousy. He poured out his woes to Miss Warburton.

"Her head is completely turned by the old fool's nonsense," he

cried irately. "What does he mean by it? He can't mean seriously to marry a girl young enough to be his grand-daughter."

But Miss Warburton declined to express an opinion as to the General's meaning.

"But you are her guardian," persisted the young man. "You surely won't let her make such a mad marriage?"

Miss Warburton smiled a little bitterly. "My dear Harold," she said, "my refusing to let her marry General Durnsford wouldn't incline her any the more to you."

"Yes it would. If he were out of the way I would win her—I would!"

Miss Warburton applauded his resolution, but advised him to keep it for the present out of sight. "Try to curb your jealousy, and take to treating her with friendly indifference," she advised.

Harold groaned. "How can I treat her with friendly indifference?" he asked, "when I always have that idiotic spectacle under my nose."

The spectacle he alluded to was of General Durnsford sitting on a garden-chair, opposite Daisy, reading aloud to her "The Unseen Universe," and stopping at intervals to explain the subject to her with his eyes fixed on her pretty, happy face.

General Durnsford showed less judgment as a master of mental culture than as an instructor in the equine art. The shallows of a girl's mind were depths of unfathomable mystery to him. He wished to interest Daisy in the questions of the day, and had no idea of the scope or the limits of her power of being so interested. He lent her the books he liked himself, and supposed that his comments were quite enough to make them clear to her. In truth, his books and his comments on them were alike Greek to her. But her profound interest in them as *his* books and *his* comments was supposed by him to be interest in the subjects they dealt with, and her delighted smiles at his goodness in making explanations were tokens to him of her intelligent grasp of those explanations.

Miss Warburton looked on at this, as at the riding lessons, in grim silence. She was not deficient in a sense of humour, but in this instance it seemed to have deserted her. The situation seemed deplorable. Harold Lane was such an eminently suitable match for Daisy. Young, pleasant-looking, good, heir to a considerable fortune, and desperately in love, Miss Warburton felt that she would do well for her niece in giving her to him. Whether she would do well in giving her to General Durnsford was a question fraught with too many complications to be easily answered.

In the meantime the General's attentions became more and more lover-like. Daisy one day expatiated on her love of dancing. She and her aunt were immediately invited to the General's house, with a view to decide upon its capabilities for being danced in. It proved to be admirably adapted for a ball. A large picture gallery, built

over a smoking room, and cut off from the rest of the house by a staircase, would make a perfect ball-room.

Miss Warburton quite warmed to the work of suggesting arrangements and decorations. The General looked and listened as she talked and moved about, pushing aside a sofa here, pinning back a curtain there, indicating the position of the band, and planning pretty corners for sitting out.

"How delightful it will be!" cried Daisy.

But the General sighed faintly. "It will be owing to your aunt if it is," he answered.

Miss Warburton carelessly dropped the piece of Turkish embroidery she was draping over a settee.

"Well, General," she said, "I think it is time for Daisy and me to go home."

When Harold Lane heard from Daisy of the projected festivity, he was filled with disgust. "I shall not go to his ball," said he; "I dislike the old fellow."

"You don't mean that, I'm sure," returned Daisy. "Your absence would cast a gloom over everything."

"You may laugh if you please," he replied grandly, "but I think it is undignified and dishonourable to accept the hospitality of a man you don't like."

"Oh, certainly," said Daisy.

There was a pause. Then Harold observed: "I suppose you don't care whether I go or not?"

Daisy appeared to consider. "Oh, well," she said, "I should miss you—at a ball. You *can* dance."

Miss Warburton was on all occasions careful about Daisy's dress. But she took special pains over it for General Durnsford's ball. And the result of her care was very good. The girl looked lovely in a white dress, trimmed with white rosebuds. The General had sent bouquets to both ladies—for Daisy one of half-blown white roses, for Miss Warburton one of scarlet hot-house flowers, which went well with her trailing draperies of black Spanish lace and the scarlet flower in her hair.

The General murmured a prettily-turned compliment to Daisy as they entered the room, but he greeted Miss Warburton with the coolest courtesy.

"I am too old to dance round dances, Miss Daisy," he said to the young girl; "but I hope you will give me two lancers, and the privilege of taking you in to supper when I have done my duty by some dowager."

Daisy delightedly acquiesced. The next person to approach her was Harold Lane.

"What have you done with your dignity and honour?" inquired Daisy.

"I have sacrificed them in this instance to love," he answered

but the last word was spoken in so low a tone that if Daisy heard it she thought it admissible to ignore it.

Daisy regretted General Durnsford's inability to dance, but as she could not have him for a partner, she had no scruple in giving Harold as many valses as he asked for.

It was a very successful ball. So everybody said. Daisy and Daisy's aunt were the subject of many comments. Which of them is the General going to marry? was the universal query. Some thought the niece, others thought the aunt, while everybody agreed that, though Daisy was a lovely girl, she would not be so handsome a woman as her aunt at Miss Warburton's age. One friend hinted congratulations to Miss Warburton on the prospect of seeing her niece so well married.

Miss Warburton replied to the hint frankly.

"I suppose it is to be," she said smiling. "But I confess the disparity of age makes me a little uneasy."

"Better be an old man's darling," etc., was the inevitable quotation that answered her.

"Yes," replied Miss Warburton thoughtfully. "If ——" She broke off. "What's that?"

There was a sudden murmur in the ball-room, gaining strength as it spread. Miss Warburton sprang to her feet. Was there a cry of "Fire"? There was certainly a strong smell of smoke. Everybody rushed to the end of the ball-room where the only exit was.

"Where is Daisy?" cried Miss Warburton, but her neighbours were too much occupied with themselves to heed her. She, too, made for the doorway, through which the smoke was now pouring in clouds.

Some drapery in the passage below had been set fire to, and now the tapestry hangings on the staircase walls were blazing. A figure was seen through the smoke mounting the staircase despite the flames, and the next moment the voice of the master of the house was heard.

"Pray do not be alarmed! There are ladders coming by which you can all easily escape, and a hose will be here immediately. Miss Warburton"—he was beside her as he finished the sentence—"I can take you down now."

"Where is Daisy?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "Young Lane is sure to look after her. But I must get you out of this."

He was trying to wrap her in a heavy ulster that he had brought up with him.

"But where is Daisy?" she repeated, resisting.

"I don't know," he said impatiently. "I can come back for her. But I cannot leave you: I can save you now. Miss Warburton, you must come."

She tore herself from his grasp. "You have no right to think of me," she cried indignantly. "Where is Daisy?"

"Here she is," answered Harold Lane, pushing his way through the throng towards them with Daisy on his arm. Miss Warburton gave her a little push towards the General.

"Save her!" she said imperatively. And he, without a word, wrapped her in the ulster with the hood over her head and face, and putting his arm round her made for the staircase.

Miss Warburton covered her face with her hands. Harold said with passionate bitterness:

"It is madness. She will be burnt to death!"

There was a moment of agonising suspense, and then a glad shout from below announced that the hazardous descent had been safely accomplished.

Two or three moments later the promised ladders arrived. The terrified guests were placed in safety, while the efforts of a large garden hose extinguished the flames before any very serious damage was done. But by this time all those (and amongst them Miss Warburton and her niece) who could not be of use had gone home.

The following day General Durnsford sent to inquire if either of the ladies had suffered from the previous night's alarm. But two or three days passed and he did not come himself.

During those days Miss Warburton was so restless and wore such a troubled look on her face that more than once Daisy said to her:

"Auntie, dear, I'm sure your nerves are all upset by the other night."

Miss Warburton owned that they were a little shaken.

"Daisy," Miss Warburton asked one day, "did you hear what General Durnsford was saying to me when you and Harold came up to us during the fire?"

"No," replied Daisy. "What was he saying? Do tell me."

But Miss Warburton answered by another question.

"Daisy! Do you love General Durnsford?" The girl flushed crimson; her blue eyes drooped.

"Oh, auntie! I—I like him very much." Miss Warburton sighed.

"My child," she began gently, after a pause, "don't think me cruel if I say that General Durnsford does not love you enough to have any right to marry you. Harold Lane—" But Daisy interrupted her with passionate petulance.

"I won't have Harold Lane stuffed eternally down my throat. I think old men are ever so much nicer than young men."

Miss Warburton dropped the subject. The next day she said to Daisy: "I wish you to write to the Dallas girls, and the young Arkwrights, and ask them to come and play lawn-tennis this afternoon."

While Daisy obeyed, Miss Warburton wrote to General Durnsford

and asked him to come, adding that she particularly wished to speak to him. But of this invitation she said nothing to Daisy. When the young people, including the inevitable Harold, arrived, Miss Warburton despatched them all to the lawn-tennis ground. Then she sat down to await the General. He came punctually to the hour she had named, and brought with him a large basket of hot-house fruit and flowers.

"For Miss Daisy," he said; "to make my peace with her for not having taken her out riding this week."

"Daisy is in the garden," returned Miss Warburton. "You shall go out to her presently—if you wish it."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"Ah, yes. You said you wished to speak to me. I am here at your command."

"Yes," said Miss Warburton, with desperate calmness; "I wish to speak to you about Daisy."

A shade of embarrassment crossed his face. But he replied, smiling:

"Your lovely niece must always be a pleasant subject of conversation."

Miss Warburton sat down and took up her church embroidery.

"General Durnsford," she began, "we have been friends for many years, and I believe you will not misunderstand the motives which prompt what I am about to say."

He made a sign of acquiescence. She went on, her voice trembling a little in spite of her utmost efforts to keep it steady.

"Are you serious in your attentions to Daisy? Do you wish to marry her?"

"Have you any objections to urge against my marrying her?"

"Yes. I think—I fear—Have you weighed the matter seriously? Have you considered the disparity of age between you, and the dangers that such a disparity in marriage entails?"

"I have seen such marriages," he replied, "and seen them turn out happily."

"Yes, in many instances they turn out well. There are characters which are happier for a disparity of age in marriage. But neither you nor Daisy are such characters. You could not make her happy."

"According to you," he said drily, "I am not capable of making any woman happy."

"And she could not make you happy," Miss Warburton went on, taking no notice of the interruption but by her deepening colour.

"Nor of letting any woman make me happy," General Durnsford continued.

"Daisy will marry you if you ask her, and you will both regret it all your lives."

"You are not complimentary."

"She is a mere child, and her character is entirely undeveloped.

But I understand her well enough to know that it will develop qualities for which you are unprepared, and which you will not know how to deal with."

"You have the remedy in your own hands ; you can refuse your consent."

"Oh," she cried, "if I could be sure that you loved her !"

"Why do you doubt that ?" he asked, leaning forward to look at her.

"Because, because," she stammered—"you did not seem the other night to think first of her—oh, don't misunderstand me ! The child is my ward. I am responsible for her happiness. I cannot let her dispose of her life at seventeen without some guarantee that she is disposing of it wisely."

"And what guarantee do you require ?" he asked, still regarding her intently.

"The assurance that you love her. That she is to you the one woman in the world. That—forgive me—that you are not marrying her because she is a pretty child who has a girlish infatuation for you. Tell me you love her as you ought to love your wife, and I shall be satisfied."

There was a long silence. At last General Durnsford said :

"You have made it clear to me that I must not aspire to Miss Daisy's hand. But it does seem a little hard that you will neither marry me yourself nor let anyone else marry me."

She flung down her work, and rose with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

"I never expected to hear such a speech from you," she said, and turning away, moved to the door with her stateliest step. But before she could reach it he was standing before her.

"Adelaide !" he said, his voice full of pain.

She wavered, retreated, and sank into a chair.

"Oh !" she said, "I thought you would understand. I was sure you would know I was only thinking of Daisy's happiness." And she broke into uncontrollable tears.

"I do know," he exclaimed ; "I do understand. And I never admired you more than I do at this moment. Not one woman in a thousand would have done what you have done. Daisy has good cause to thank you. But, tell me, why did you answer me so cruelly when I spoke to you three months ago ?"

She turned her face away and said nothing. He knelt on one knee beside her and took one hand in his, saying :

"I will resign Daisy if Daisy's aunt will be her substitute."

"Some day—perhaps," she answered ; "when Daisy has forgotten."

In the meantime the lawn-tennis players had finished one set, and Daisy, whose ears had caught the sound of General Durnsford's dog-cart wheels, excused herself from taking part in the next. Harold,

under the delusion that he would have a nice little tête-à-tête with the lady of his affections, declared himself too exhausted to play again. But Daisy took no notice of him. As soon as she saw the second set started she went away, racket in hand, towards the house. Harold slowly followed her. He saw her pause and look in at the side window of the drawing-room with a happy smile on her face. He saw the smile suddenly quenched. The next moment she rushed past him unconscious of his presence, and disappeared into the little summer-house behind him. On the impulse of the moment he too stepped up to the window, and looked in to see what Daisy had seen : General Durnsford on one knee beside Miss Warburton's chair, lifting her hand to his lips.

"Old simpletons," muttered the young man. And then—"Poor little darling," while on his face shone triumphant resolution.

But Daisy lay sobbing on the floor of the summer-house, convinced that her heart was broken !

VIRGINIA TAYLOUR.

DREAR NOVEMBER.

THE valley lies in mist, the skies are grey,
A few dead leaves to blackened branches cling,
The sport of chilling winds which ruthless fling
These children of the summer far away,
To join their fellow-victims of decay.
Upon a bough a linnet tries to sing ;
Its mournful note recalls a far-off Spring,
Before its desolate home was swept away,
When with its little mate and nestlings warm
It caroled forth for joy. The joy is gone !
No shelter now against the coming storm,
No answering note,—the linnet is alone.
Upon the grass the soddened petals fall
From the late roses mouldering on the wall.

E. LEITH.

MODERN BABYLON.



ON THE SEINE.

temperament and atmosphere, that those who fall victims to it are unable to endure it ; life ceases to charm ; the Seine is resorted to, and the Morgue becomes tenanted by those who, forgetting Shakespeare, " fly to the ills they know not of."

Nothing can be more delightful than a sojourn in the fair city that once ruled the world of fashion. But it is especially so to those who, like the present writer, possess many friends amongst the bright Parisians, and to whom it is a sort of second home. Very much

IT is difficult to approach Paris without thinking of the words which head this paper. It seems in deed and in truth a Modern Babylon, given over to lightness and frivolity. A certain feeling of depression takes possession of the spirit ; and upon entering the railway station one feels inclined to enter the return train to Boulogne, which will shortly start from the other platform, and escape back to more wholesome influences.

But the mood quickly evaporates. Depression cannot exist very long in this gay capital, with its sparkling air, its wide thoroughfares, its tree-lined boulevards, and its myriad inhabitants whose first object in life is pleasure, and who make of business and serious work nothing more than a means to this end. Melancholy, indeed, is so foreign to the French

has been said and written about the lightness and insincerity of the French character ; and, as usual, very much has been exaggerated, very much is absolutely false. The French are always pleasant companions, and they can be very good and firm friends. They take life from a different point of view to the English ; and a comparison between the two nations will not always be in favour of the latter. But comparisons are invidious, and, in some instances, unprofitable. I can only say, that in Paris, surrounded by many friends who meet me with open arms, no matter how long the absence may have been ; who take up the old friendship exactly where it was laid down ; time flies on silver wings, and the days pass too quickly.

This year, all the world seems to have visited this Modern Babylon. It has been a World's Fair. The French have reaped a golden harvest ; and in too many instances, a wicked harvest ; for prices have been quite as fabulous as they have been represented. A large proportion of the visitors to the great Exhibition and the wonderful Eiffel Tower have no doubt placed themselves under the care and guidance of Messrs. Cook and Son, and these seem rather to have gained than lost in comparison with other years ; for we hear of special terms and impossibly cheap excursions which must have ended in a general satisfaction to everyone concerned, railway companies and hotel keepers excepted. However, people have a wonderful way of taking care of themselves in these days : and we may be sure that even railway companies and hotel keepers will make themselves certain of a substantial quid-pro-quo in all their worldly transactions.

Amongst the world's crowd, we also paid our devotions to the gay scenes of Paris. We started from London one very bright morning. The train of course was crowded. On reaching Folkestone, the sea was as blue and calm almost as the Mediterranean. The officials all knew us well, and greeted us with almost French-like vivacity. They always do so : and it adds pleasure to the journey. It is so easy and so much better, in going through life, to scatter a little sunshine along your path. A friendly interest in those you meet ; the recognition of the one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin ; the small substantial remembrances, which make so little difference to you, so much to them ; and you have left behind you a pleasant impression ; you have done good ; you have made one or another more satisfied with life, which is hard and prosy for most of us ; more able to bear his burden ; and you have ensured a welcome when next you pass that way.

That particular morning the boat was crowded, and the passage across was without its mauvais quart-d'heure. No one regretted the failure of the Channel Tunnel. Long may it be conspicuous by its absence ! The dome of *Nôtre Dame de Boulogne* was presently outlined in the blue sky, and we passed in between the piers of the good old town, with that rush of water, that freshness of feeling which

is ever there, exhilarating as a draught of champagne. To the left is the *Etablissement* with its naughty gambling rooms, which have done no good to Boulogne in general ; and beyond it, upon the heights, rise the picturesque houses of the quaint old district given over to the fishing population. In this instance, distance lends enchantment to the view ; for once within the district, climbing its hilly streets, you have every reason to be thankful that your lines were not cast in these places.

And yet, at sundry times and on divers occasions, mark the fishwomen that issue from them, clean, fresh and bright-faced, with well-turned ankles showing below their short petticoats, and well-shaped feet that wear the sabots so neatly and cunningly. Their large white caps and thick gold earrings are their pride, for they have no faith in beauty unadorned. You will see them in groups, chattering and laughing, and making their way to the end of the pier to watch the fishing boats going on long or short voyages, as the case may be, manned by husbands, brothers, lovers. And again you may see them crowding into the fishermen's church, kneeling in prayer and invoking the protection of their favourite saints upon the speeding barque ; whilst tiny vessels hang suspended from the roof, and on the walls are signs and symbols of the fisherman's life to remind you of those that go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters.

But to-day we land on the opposite quay, where the train is in waiting for the Paris passengers. The buffet is thriving, for everyone has been well, and everyone is hungry. One hardly knows which is the most amusing exhibition, most curious jargon : the English passenger trying to talk French, or the French waiter airing his remarkable English. Then comes the hurried but by no means reasonable reckoning ; seats are taken ; and the train slowly moves along the quay to the terminus proper. Everything seems lively ; flags are flying in the harbour ; the water is rushing through the locks from the inner basin like a Norwegian waterfall ; the old *Hôtel des Bains* has once more opened its doors to the world ; the fishmarket has its usual loungers without, its noisy auction within ; and the station swallows us up. A few minutes' halt, and away we steam towards Paris.

Here and there the road is interesting. Small towns, quaint villages, one or two ancient and distinctive churches ; a stretch of sea and shore on the right ; a couple of well-built lighthouses ; and presently we reach Amiens.

"Amiens, celebrated for its cathedral," as the geographies tell us. And yet how few people know anything about it ; or ever break their journey in order to pay their devotions to this marvellous example of architecture. I heard the other day of a traveller, an enthusiast in these matters, who ran round to look at the cathedral whilst the train was waiting. At that time it halted twenty minutes.

It was not three o'clock. He entered the building intending to give a hasty glance round; became lost in the wonderful carving and all the minute details; and when he awoke to ordinary life and looked at his watch, it was twenty minutes to seven. Train, luggage, Paris, the world in general, all had been forgotten. And after all, this is the sort of enthusiasm which sends the world upwards.

To-day, we went on. V. had never seen the cathedral and very much wanted to do so, but he was still more anxious to reach Paris, its frivolities and dissipations, and when the train went on we went with it.

In due time we steamed into the Gare du Nord, and there came in for a weary waiting. We were behind time; the Brussels train had just arrived, and until every stick and stone of its luggage, every passenger had been cleared away, they would not attend to us.

It was amusing to watch the crowd; it always is so: the examination of the luggage; the various expressions of resignation, anger, anxiety on the countenances of the victims; the persistency of the officials: though for minute searching, for incivility and deliberate annoyance, commend me to Charing Cross station above and beyond any place abroad. They call it "obeying orders and doing their duty," and if it is so, those in authority would do well to moderate their ideas in these matters. We cannot imagine the goods and chattels of an august chairman or director treated with the same freedom and want of ceremony. Perhaps it was necessary to be somewhat more vigilant during the dynamite scare, but that is all over and done with.

To-night, the Gare du Nord was crowded with its double array of passengers: most of the Brussels department distinctly foreign;



GOING UP THE EIFFEL TOWER.

bearing that unwashed appearance which is the *cachet* of foreigners, and which they think gives them distinction — as indeed it does.

The other element was for the most part as unmistakably English ; and it must be admitted that a great many of these were also, to say the least, eccentric in appearance. One determined-looking woman, with a flattened bonnet and a figure like a perambulating balloon, clutched her inoffensive husband, who was a head and shoulders shorter than herself, put him into a corner and cried : "Now you stop there, and move out at your peril ! Leave me to look after things." He took the command with the greatest meekness possible ; shouldered his umbrella as a sentry would his gun, and looked a very patient and ridiculous object. His grenadier of a wife, who was really the sentry, went off in search of her luggage, found it and cleared it in no time. She even intimidated the French officials, who were glad to get rid of her at any price. "Ah ! ces anglaises ! quelles femmes !" one murmured to another, and the remark was not intended for admiration.

But our turn came at last, and we found ourselves rattling through the streets of Paris in one of those open *voitures de place* which every moment seem about to let one in for a breakdown—though of a very different sort from that connected with the light fantastic toe.

It was the usual scene, gay and airy. The long, straight thoroughfare of the Rue Lafayette ; the tall houses with their white, stone-like fronts and their endless balconies of open iron work. The drivers in the streets, as usual, going their own way and getting into everybody else's. The boulevards with their trees and cafés and crowds, and then our hotel. On this occasion it was the Hôtel Chatham, and it is much to be commended and recommended. It is sufficiently large, yet not gigantic ; you are a person, and are not labelled with a number, like a convict ; it is very central and well situated ; its rooms are less oppressive than most of the Paris hotels ; and its prices are moderate. This latter is an especial virtue in a year when Paris has not known the meaning of the word moderation.

One of the first things to be remarked in Paris is that, like London, it is becoming really more American than English. The unpleasant twang greets you at every turn. In London, all the large hotels are crowded with them ; and one wonders which is cause and which effect : whether the Americans are the result of these modern caravanseries or vice-versa. Either way, the end is the same. And still they come to London. And still they go to Paris.

That first night at table d'hôte (we were rather late for it, but they admitted us) we sat next an American lady and her daughter. The daughter read a fast French novel in the interval of the courses ; improving her knowledge of the language possibly, but not her morals.

At the end of dinner, when the ice came round, they had two dishes placed before them, each containing a substantial remainder. These they finished, together with two platefuls of macaroons, and then looked round for more. But the waiters had discreetly vanished, and the damsels said to her mother in very ill-used but very audible tones : "I guess we shall have to wait until to-morrow. Then we'll manage better."

They rose to depart. So did we ; both possibly bound for the same goal : the World's Fair. But our ambition to-night soared to elevated regions : no less than the summit of the Eiffel Tower.

We went forth. The boulevards were crowded. Gas flared in all directions ; it was almost light as day, whilst the scene was much more picturesque and enlivening. Why is it that everything at night bears a greater charm ? Even the common-place becomes almost romantic, the rugged softened, the ugly subdued, and the unsightly hidden. Even human nature of the least attractive description gains by the change.

The scene was almost bewildering. Carriages thronged the streets. Omnibuses—the ponderous Paris omnibuses—were laden within and without. You could scarcely move along the pavements. There was not a vacant seat inside or outside the cafés. And yet, somehow, the drivers tear along the streets, and with less rule of the road there seems far less obstruction than in the streets of London.

We were soon racing down the Rue Royale and through the Place de la Concorde, where the fountains were playing in the gaslight and the obelisk rose in classic form. Then down the quays of the Seine. And there in the distance the Eiffel Tower reared its gigantic head towards cloudland. It was just beginning to light up, and it looked like some far off appearance in the sky ; a new constellation.

Men were running beside the carriages selling tickets of admission, for there was no such thing as paying at the entrance gates. We rolled over one of the bridges of the Seine, and soon found ourselves at the foot of the Tower.

It was an indescribable scene ; almost impossible to be taken in. It was not earth, but fairyland. Darkness had quite fallen. The tower itself was brilliantly and effectively illuminated, both with gas and electric light. We stood beneath it, looking upwards, and became silent with wonder, lost in amazement. No description had done justice to the structure, or enabled us in the least degree to realise it. Expecting to find the tower ugly and aggressive, we found it a thing of beauty ; an airy fairy structure ; a marvel of ingenuity ; an eighth Wonder of the world. The Colossus of Rhodes, indeed, one of the former Wonders of the world, would have looked a mere infant of days in the hands of a giant if brought into comparison with the Eiffel Tower.

The very people as they streamed to and fro in hundreds and thousands seemed dwarfed to half the size of human beings. It gave one a feeling almost of unhappiness, as if we had suddenly come upon a new world, a new order of things. In the centre of the space marked by the four feet of the tower was an immense basin containing a sculptured group. On this the electric light played ; and as the streams of people passed and repassed under its rays, they were lighted up beyond the brightness of sunshine, and sharp, deep shadows constantly crossed and recrossed the ground like phantoms chasing each other.

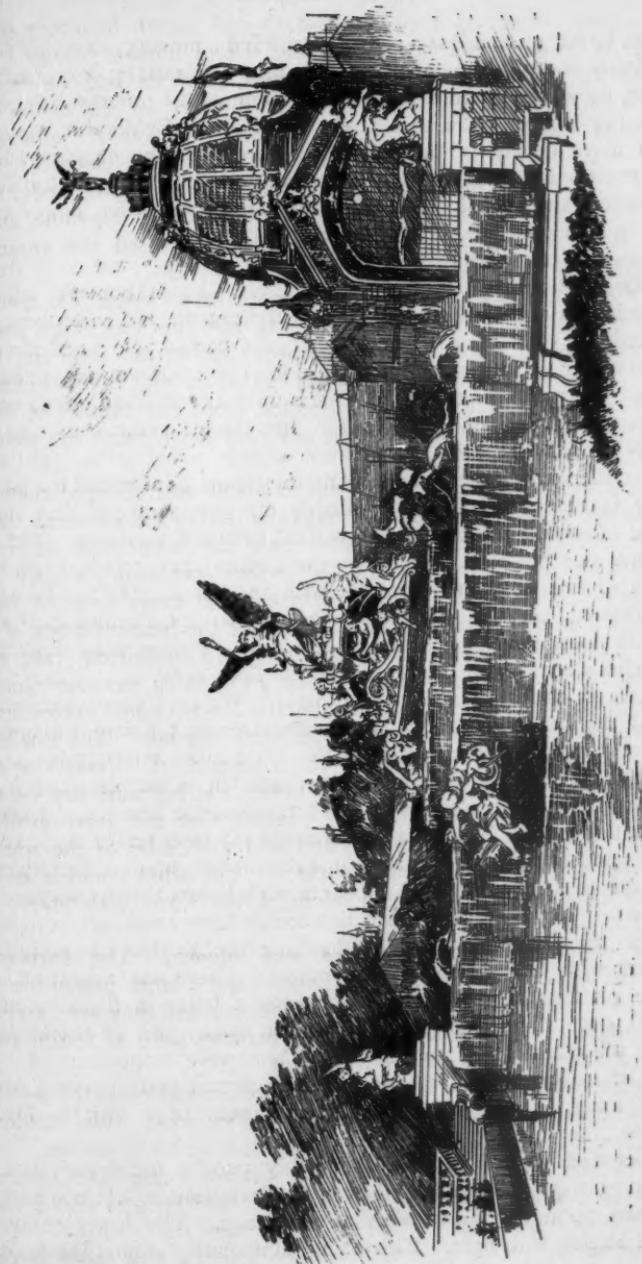
This brightness and illumination extended on all sides. The dome of the centre building was lighted up with row after row of gas jets ; the wings took up the tale, and the opaque globes ran from end to end. Above the dome the statue was lighted up with brilliant effect by two streams of electric light directed from the summit of the tower, the dark background of the sky only heightening the weird charm.

These streams of electric light shifted about and changed colour, now thrown upon the dome, now magically tinting the fountains that played and plashed around. Very near the tower was an airy structure called the Pavillon du Gaz, which was simply a blaze of light inside and out. It looked so ethereal that every moment you expected to see it dissolve and disappear, like the baseless fabric of a vision. It was a vision indeed, charming and enchanting ; and we were plunged in a waking dream. The whole thing was marvellous, and V. exclaimed at length : "None but the French could accomplish such wonders !" a sentiment we immediately echoed. The English might plot and plan for ever ; they could never do it. Everything of the kind that was ever seen pales before the extraordinary vision of the Champ de Mars. We can imagine that the great exhibition of 1851 was considered fairyland and a Wonder of the world by those who were there to witness it ; but what could it have been in comparison with the wonders of the Paris Exhibition of 1889 ?

The night was sultry ; the heat was intense. The Parisians wandered about in their airiest costumes. But a large proportion of the French were evidently from the Provinces ; and they were armed with baskets and umbrellas ; and their costumes were as fearful and wonderful as the patois they conversed in.

But we, lost in dreams and wonder, gazed on and on at the scene ; and the more we gazed the more bewildered we grew. The building seemed endless, the place gigantic. It was a world of its own. It ought to have taken years to construct instead of days and months. Was it all destined to demolition when the last day was ended and the last door was closed ? This seemed impossible.

However, we awoke to something like realities, and made for the entrance to the tower. During all this time the lifts had been going



AT THE WORLD'S FAIR.

up and down, up and down ; always crowded ; moving smoothly and noiselessly as a roller might pass over a lawn ; no rattling of trains, no jarring, no whirring and wheezing. The miniature railway close by, conveying its passengers to different parts of the Exhibition, worked much more noisily. The whistle shrieked and the engine puffed like an asthmatic machine going up hill, and the carriages rumbled and rolled and rattled. But the machinery of the Eiffel Tower was built by a sorcerer, and acted like witchcraft.

True, one of the lifts came to a sudden stoppage the other day, and for an hour people found themselves, like Mahomet's coffin, suspended in mid-air between earth and heaven ; and some women shrieked and others fainted, and strong men turned pale ; and it was not even a case of "Sauve qui peut !" for there was nothing but air to tread upon if they escaped ; and it is only disembodied spirits who possess the privilege of walking on air. But the little contretemps after all only proved that even the greatest of men are human, and that now and then when wheels want oiling they must be attended to. And variety is charming : though probably the occupants of that suspended lift would rather have dispensed with the variation. But it all came right at last ; and when once more they touched earth, no doubt, five minutes afterwards, with the elasticity of the French temperament, they had resorted in a body to the Pavillon du Gaz and with loud laughter and much *trinketing* of glasses were drinking each other's health and the success of *La Tour Eiffel*.

But to go back to our own first night. We took our tickets and entered the lift, and had not two minutes to wait before we found we were parting company with earth. The effect was curious and uncanny. We rose higher and higher, and felt as people must feel who are going up in a balloon. We reached the first stage, where one has to change lifts. It is an immense platform full of noise and business and bustle. It contains large restaurants, upon one of which the names of Spiers and Pond appear in such letters that he may read who runs. No charges in Paris this season have been more exorbitant than those of this restaurant, therefore the English can scarcely find fault with the French in this matter. There was a post office on the platform, and anyone might write a letter in these cloudy regions, post it here, and it would go forth to any part of the Globe bearing the mark of *La Tour Eiffel*. There were emporiums of industry where crystal goblets were being ground and engraved and carried away by the dozen as remembrances of a visit to high latitudes.

We left the lift, which held about fifty people, and a marvellous sight met our gaze as we looked over the balustrades. It was looking down upon the world with a vengeance. The lower regions seemed blazing with light. Everything immediately around the tower stood out as clearly as by day, and far more effectively. It was one vast illumination, as if the world had gone into *fête* and festivity for

some national or even cosmopolitan event. The streams of people walking to and fro had the effect of ghosts: footsteps and voices were lost. Not even a buzz or a murmur reached our listening ears. Their shadows as they passed in and out of the electric light looked cold and black. The fountains played, and the coloured lights were thrown upon them, but we heard no splash. We seemed to be looking on at a pantomime or a world of phantoms.

And stretching around far and wide was the great city, which we could only trace by its lights. The scene was brilliant and exciting.

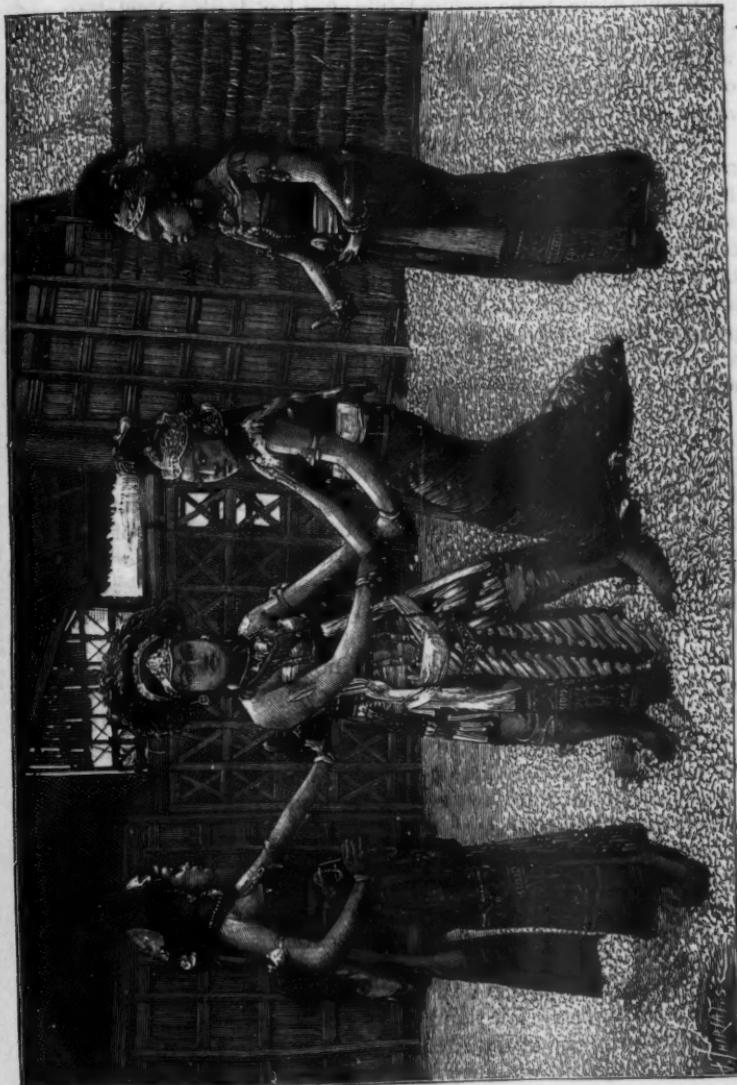
But we were only at the first stage. We entered the second lift, which took us up to the second stage, and here we found ourselves above the highest building in the world. Two more lifts took us safely to the top of the tower. Even here the platform was capable of holding a great crowd of people, and there were all sorts of booths selling the Eiffel Tower in every conceivable reproduction. It was more wonderful than ever to look down upon the world, and we felt we had done well to take our first impressions by the magic of night-light.

There are also staircases as far as the second stage, and you have the option of walking up if you prefer it. The first time we went up by daylight, we had the felicity of seeing a very stout lady who had had the courage to attempt the staircase, reach the end, and with a cry of "Ouf!" at the last step, fall gracefully but without ceremony into the arms of an astonished gentleman who happened to be passing at the moment.

By daylight the scene is more extensive, but less impressive. The whole city is mapped out in a comprehensive view. The Seine runs its course like a silvery stream, winding about, and passing into the regions of Sèvres, and even far beyond. The countries beyond France that were to be seen are of course a delusion. The monuments of Paris itself rise up in every direction. Notre Dame with all its beauties is conspicuous. The boulevards may be traced in a long continuous line, and even here their trees look fresh and green. The crowds of people and carriages look like puppets in a show. There is a slight constant movement or agitation. We are looking down upon a world in which we seem to have no part. We begin to feel as if we could realise the sensations of those who may be gazing at us from some far-off star or planet: a race of beings endowed with limitless powers of vision. The world's fair at our feet is absolutely bewildering. The banks of the Seine are lined with buildings that seem to have sprung up in a night, like mushrooms. Everything is pregnant with life and movement, excitement and animation. The river itself is as animated as the land. Steam-boats are constantly running up and down, crowded with passengers. The floating baths were never so much patronised. And, alas! that sad building under the very shadows of Notre Dame, the Morgue, was never so full.

THE FERNERY AT THE EXHIBITION.





JAVANESE DANCERS.

You trace the Champs Elysées, which two hundred and fifty years ago was first planned out for Marie de Medicis. Then, in the days of the de Pompadour, the trees were cut down in obedience to her capricious whim, to be restored only after her death. You also trace the Avenue Montaigne, once the Allée des Veuves, where the rich widows would meet for their drives, and console themselves and each other in their bereavement until time permitted them once more to return to the dissipations of the gay world.

The Arc de Triomphe stands out conspicuously, and the magnificent and comparatively new Avenue beyond it stretches down to the Bois de Boulogne. Here we see the whole extent of the famous wood, skirted by Longchamp, where the French Derby is run. If the trees could only whisper secrets like the birds of the air, what tales they could tell! What romances, what intrigues, what tender assignations, what broken vows; what duels fought for an idea; or, perhaps, for the sake of winning a woman's fair smiles, that so often are also fickle and false. Yet they have ever been the levers of the world, and ever will be.

And in the far-off distance, beyond the column which marks the place of the old Bastille, we can just trace the outlines of Père la Chaise: the goal to which all this hurrying, breathless crowd are hastening—the grave. How many great names are reposing there: from George Sand and Rossini down to the pathetic tomb of Abelard and Héloïse. It is crowded, indeed, with names that will never die; and its sad cypresses pointing upwards whisper to each other that all men, even the greatest, are Time's subjects, and must yield in turn to the inevitable law.

As for the Exhibition itself, it is no doubt the most extensive, most marvellous, most interesting and complete that has yet been seen. At a first visit it is bewildering in the extreme. It must take weeks to see it perfectly; and unless you go systematically to work, you may wander over and over again through the same courts and departments, and like the Irishman who objected to beer when he had been used to whisky, "seem to get no forwarder."

Every country appears to be represented; and perhaps one feels that one would have been grateful for a little less. It cannot be denied that a great deal is uninteresting, or appeals only to the initiated few. You wander into a department only to wander out again rather vexed and disappointed. There is a great deal that is small and trivial; a great deal that you would think more in place at an ordinary country fair; and it is not everyone who has the inexhaustible vivacity of the French, which would carry them through a week's dissipation without rest or sleep; or the wonderful physical powers of the honest visitor from the provinces, which produce the same result. The very planning out and disposition of the whole thing is a frightful tax upon one's mental and physical energies. You almost envy the old people who are being perambulated about in

Bath chairs. You have to wander over an immense deal of ground. Every country is a small exhibition in itself. There are an endless number of detached buildings, most of them designed according to their own laws of architecture. The general effect is varied and good, but the general result is one of horrible exhaustion and fatigue.

But on the whole you are repaid. It is, as already remarked, undoubtedly the finest and most complete exhibition ever seen. In an age of such rapid progress, of course this is only as it should be. The art treasures, especially, are inexhaustible. You walk through the galleries, and one object after another arrests the attention and claims your astonishment and admiration. The pictures are endless; the collections of old china fill you with rapture and despair: despair that your purse is not that of Fortunatus. You are surfeited with old tapestry, old enamels, old ironwork and old furniture. For a great deal that has been brought together belongs to the past, and proves that this is not in all cases an age of progress.

Some of the most curious exhibitions in the whole World's Fair—and some of the least pleasant—are the Javanese dancers: women in the costume of the country, who go through the most singular postures, extraordinary contortions, wave-like, undulating motions it is possible to conceive. Every moment they surprise you with some new movement, and every now and then you think they are about to fall to pieces. The Javanese music, which consists in rattling bobbins of wood together strung upon wires, is quite as remarkable.

When you are tired and want rest and change and fresh air, you may take your seat under the shadow of one of the four kiosks, and listen to one of the four military bands that play there day after day. If in need of luncheon, you have restaurants at hand. Here, also, you will be filled with astonishment, though probably not admiration.

Our own first luncheon was a very modest one. We had breakfasted late, and should dine early, for the sake of being in time for *L'Etrangère* at the *Comédie Française*. Luncheon therefore consisted of a slice of melon and mutton cutlets: nothing more. "Messieurs will commence with a portion of melon?" said the insinuating waiter in very Alsatian French: and the melon was brought. The two slices probably cost the restaurant four sous, but they charged us the modest sum of four francs. The total of the bill was sixteen francs, which included a bottle of *vin ordinaire* at two francs. The cheapest wine at these places is generally the best.

Most of the charges in Paris have been on a similar scale, so that the French will have no reason to complain of a failure of the golden harvest they anticipated. For the charges have not deterred people from visiting the World's Fair. Millions have flocked to it. Paris

has been crammed to suffocation. The air has been exhausted, and one wonders that supplies have not failed also. The inhabitants of Paris—those who leave it every year for the country—have left it earlier than usual, horrified at the noise and confusion, the *bouleversement* and disorganisation of the whole city.

Within the boundaries of the Exhibition the people who to ourselves created the most amusement and surprise were the French from the provinces. They brought all their airs and graces with them : also their umbrellas and their luncheon baskets. They were there in large numbers, day after day ; and it was the numbers that created surprise. The proverbial stocking-foot which all the *paysans* of France possess must have been largely drawn upon. “*Nos économies nous permettent de voyager*,” one of them proudly remarked to me in the course of an interesting conversation. They went through the Exhibition with eyes and mouths open, amazed at everything they saw. With many of them it was a first visit to the Capital : and the answer to the question : “What made you come?” was invariably the same : “*Pour voir la Tour Eiffel*.” For it is not only easy to enter into conversation with a Frenchman, but difficult to avoid it. The lively Celtic temperament cannot long endure silence. With them, silence is silver ; it is speech that is golden.

At mid-day, every open air bench was appropriated by these provincials. Their precious umbrellas reclined, and they spread their *déjeuner* and drank their beer or wine al-fresco, in no way disconcerted by the observing crowd. They were always clean and neat, but too often rough and clumsy specimens of humanity. They could not appreciate much of what they saw. The wonderful collection of art treasures, the progress of science, the beauties of manufacture and rare textures—all this was very much beyond them. But they could look upon it with awe and reverence ; with something of the feeling that a pilgrim gazes upon a long-sought shrine ; the beauties would insensibly affect them, though they would not be able to analyse their feelings, or separate cause from effect ; and so the tax upon the stocking-foot might very easily be returned with interest. The *tout-ensemble*, the *coup d'œil*, was not above and beyond them ; the plashing fountains, the assemblage of wonderful buildings ; the illuminations—all this to them must have been fairyland : with the Eiffel Tower for their wonderful *piece-de-résistance*.

Fairyland : and not to these good *paysans* only. It must have borne this appearance more or less to everyone who has visited the Exhibition. It will never be known how much the Eiffel Tower has contributed to its great success, drawing thousands and hundreds of thousands to gaze upon it with the inevitable attraction of a magnet. In its way it is a thing of beauty. A light, airy structure, through which you can see the bright blue sky beyond. A marvellous example of ingenuity, proving its originator a genius in his depart-

ment. Perfectly proportioned, possessing a great deal of grace, looking amazingly frail and fragile for so great a structure; almost inspiring one with the feeling with which one gazes at a child's house of cards; it has nothing to offend, much to create admiration.

The days of the Exhibition are now numbered; but it has been so great a success; has so nearly reached perfection; at the same time has been so great a whirl, so heavy a tax upon one's vital energies, that one is almost induced to wish it might be the last of its kind. "We have now had enough of exhibitions!" a very great authority upon such subjects exclaimed to me. And one is tempted to echo the sentiment.

CHARLES W. WOOD.



SUNRISE.

I SAW her then, and I can see her now,
The dawn upon her brow—
The crimson dawn, flooding the broad, grey stream,
And banks where rushes grew, like some fair dream,
Where Hope and Youth, and early Love had met,
Can I forget ?

Her hair blown back; had her eyes caught the glow
From Eastern skies ? Yet no;
With a more steadfast radiance still they shined,
As lighted from some hidden lamp behind,
Upon her lips a smile that came and went,
And spoke content.

Oh, happy vision ! Oh, the river wide,
With its swift fleeting tide !
The low-lying flats by early breezes swept.
The sun afame, to sudden glory leapt !
Love, Light and Joy seemed born that very hour,
A triple power.

SUNSET.

The day was dying—o'er the river grey
A misty vapour lay.
The winter sun sank slowly in the West
Casting a fitful gleam upon its breast.
The reeds and rushes stood in ghostly ranks
Upon its banks.

Silence enfolded all—more sad than speech ;
Deserted lay the reach.
Yet ever and anon I seemed to see
A girlish form that beckoned unto me ;
A form with hair blown back and eyes aglow,
Through mist and snow.

D I V I D E D.

BY KATHERINE CARR

CHAPTER X.

THE "BON ESPOIR."

"Les petits oiseaux qui sont dans les bois sont joyeux pour leur âge !
 "Quand je les entends chanter, j'ai regret du temps que je perds à pleurer.
 "Pourquoi pleurer le temps passé ? Hélas ! il ne revient point. Les petits oiseaux ne pleurent pas."

Thus chanted Yvonne Hévin, in a low, happy voice as she lifted her glowing eyes to the quiet grey sky.

"You are very gay, Yvonne," remarked Raoul. "This is the fourth chanson you have sung since we came out."

"Yes. It is because I am happy. To-day, it seems as if winter had gone and that spring was coming."

"It is only a lull before fresh storms. This depression in the weather has been gradually creeping to us from the north. It oppresses me. Look at that grey bank of cloud on the horizon. There will be a thunderstorm before night."

They were together in the *Bon Espoir*, Raoul working the sails, and Yvonne in her favourite position at the helm.

It was one of those still, mild days that occasionally surprise us about the end of January, as though wind and rain-clouds had worn themselves out, and were resting, for a space, to gather up fresh stores before they poured out upon the world their wild March passions.

There was barely enough wind to fill the sails, but having no definite object in view, Raoul de Kériadec and Yvonne were undisturbed by the slow progress of the little vessel, and contented themselves with cruising lazily down the bay towards Penmarch. The shores past which they drifted grew more and more savage and desolate, with great jagged cliffs and bare promontories, and sharp brown rocks jutting out of the sea like a guard of spears all along the coast.

Everything was grey, dead, monotonous ; the quiet expanse of sea only darkened now and then by the thin black line of unbroken ripple that brought a welcome puff of air to swell the sails of the boat that was gliding smoothly and slowly over the water.

Raoul and Yvonne spoke but little. Theirs was an intimacy that allowed of silence ; they had been companions too long to feel called upon to make conversation to each other, unless the spirit moved them. Except for occasional instructions to Yvonne in her capacity

as coxswain, Raoul scarcely spoke ; but sat smoking his pipe meditatively, with the grave thoughtfulness that had come over him during the last six months.

He was much changed. He was no longer a raw, unfledged boy, unable to govern his temper, quick to speak his thoughts as they came without pausing to consider the consequences, and intolerant of opposition. He had had a mental experience that helped to bring out all his latent vigour of manly self-reliance, and that gave him a knowledge of the world which otherwise, in his monotonous country life, he might never have acquired. He had loved ; believing, after the fashion of his proud forefathers, that the love of a de Kériadec would be an honour to the woman on whom it was conferred. Instead of that, it had been despised and trampled upon as worthless, thrust back into his own keeping, without kindness or gratitude, as though the devotion of a de Kériadec might be had by anyone for the asking.

He became morose, embittered, fiercely indignant. Then, because, in spite of his wrongs, he could not leave off loving his wilful young wife, he began to think that there must be some good reason for it all—some fault in himself that might be mended.

He was by no means a fool ; though, up to the present, he had never seen the necessity for exerting or educating his brain ; and, though slow to assimilate new ideas, he had a certain clear distinctiveness that helped him to form very cogent and practical conclusions when once he set himself to master a question.

The study of one's own character, engrossing as it is to most people, is the most difficult one in which to arrive at an unbiased judgment ; and it says a good deal for Raoul's strength of mind and honesty, that one of his first conclusions was to the effect that he was lamentably narrow-minded and prejudiced. It was the very natural result of his home education and bringing up ; but it had worked untold mischief in his relations with Denise. She did not understand his prejudices. She may have treated him unfairly ; but he, on his part, had drawn much of his misery on himself by his intolerance, his boyish jealousy and want of forbearance.

After their final parting he set himself the task of deliberately sifting the causes of all their troubles, weighing the pros and cons with a rigid justice that laid as much of the blame as he was able on his own conduct. If, in the end, he found it impossible to acquit Denise, he kept it to himself ; and never by a word hinted to anyone else that he had learnt through much tribulation to repent his hasty and imprudent marriage. But those two years of alternate passion and coldness, anger and remorse, hope and disappointment, had left him much older, graver—harder in many ways. What else could be expected ? His life was practically spoilt. There was nothing to look forward to ; no object for which to work. He was the last of the de Kériadecs. With him the good old name would die ; and

then the beloved home would pass into the hands of a distant and unknown branch of the family.

Before his marriage, life at Camper had seemed good enough. The days had been all too short for his redundant spirits and energy. His estate, and the fishing population of the Coast, had amply provided him with interests. Why, then, should he not resume the thread of those bygone contented days?

He could not do so. Every nook and corner of his home was haunted by Denise—a shadowy vision of lovely womanhood, that cast a faint and melancholy air of dead regret over all the places that had known her bright presence. An echo of her voice, soft and sweet, and of her low, rich laugh, seemed to linger yet about the deserted rooms and corridors where her light footstep no longer fell. Sometimes during the winter evenings, when Raoul sat alone in the silent hall, a sudden creak of the oak rafters, or the wind shaking the handle of the door, would make him raise his eyes with a start, half expecting to see her standing there, in all her Parisian daintiness—with the gold-brown curls on her white forehead, the red lips a little pouting, the exasperatingly-tender blue eyes, that could flash out upon the man who loved her with such bewitching petulance. How he longed at such times to hear the “click-clack” of the little high-heeled shoes on the parquet floor, the “frou-frou” of the bridal fineries he had pretended in his manly ignorance half to despise as childish frivolities!

Often, the loneliness and aimlessness of his existence goaded him into longings for a career of reckless folly, such as most men of his age and in his circumstances would have excused in themselves. He was young; and the best of men is only human, with instinctive desires for amusement and companionship; and if Raoul was sorely tempted to throw off his self-control and seek relaxation in some less dull and quiet place than Camper, who could blame him? But it was his inward conviction that if once he allowed himself to lose this strenuous control over himself he would be unable to recover it; unable to live up to those brave old words carved on the tomb of the hero, *Gesril de Kériadec*:

“*Né Breton, tu n'oublieras
Afin d'agir loyalement.*”

The people round about Camper declared that Monsieur de Kériadec was more reckless and daring than ever that winter. It was as if death was unwilling to take up the challenge which in reckless defiance of danger he seemed to have flung to its grim powers.

Not that he had any wish to die, or any morbid thoughts about it; but death, as death, had no terrors for him, so long as it came quickly and not in any slowly-lingering form; and it would have one merit if no other: it would free his wife from the last of her fetters.

Once only, that winter, did he leave Camper. It was late in January, and he was only away for the inside of a week. He told no one where he had been; but on his return there was some, scarcely-definable, change in him—a kind of hard callousness, with sudden bursts of forced spirits, as if his patience had come to an end at last.

He had been to Paris; had seen his wife without her knowledge, and learnt, from a friend whom he could trust, that Madame de Kériadec was one of the gayest and most charming of beauties in the gayest and most charming of Parisian circles. She, at all events, had profited by her share of the bargain! And her husband returned to Camper resolutely determined to forget her, as she deserved to be forgotten.

Yvonne Hévin had conquered! Now that Madame de Kériadec with her arts and wiles had disappeared from the scene, there was a chance that the cloud would be lifted from Raoul's brow and that he would regain his old frank enjoyment of life.

Ever since Denise's departure Yvonne had omitted the supplement that latterly, in all good faith, she had added to her evening prayer for Raoul's safety, "Dieu te sauve." She had never tried to analyse what she meant by these words, until the night after Denise left Camper; then her instinctive return to the old, simple blessing, "Dieu te garde," told her that it was from Denise she had wished him to be saved—released from the wife who was making his life a burden to him.

That she was able to think such thoughts, and yet not hate and despise the baseness of them, shows the distorted and ignorant narrowness of the girl's mind. It never seemed to strike her that a perfect understanding between husband and wife might be the surest means to promote Raoul's happiness. What she wanted was to give him happiness *herself*, to be indispensable to him, to keep him a true Breton of the Bretons—narrow, prejudiced and exclusive, with no wide, outside interests to carry him beyond the range of her own limited experience.

In all this there was a kind of savage innocence totally distinct from the low cunning and intrigue of one woman plotting to wrest a man's love from another.

Yvonne was not incapable of malice; was there not one little episode in the past, which always stood now, like a phantom, between her and Raoul, though she knew him to be in ignorance of it? But if anyone had fairly represented to her the actual moral wrong of her unreasoning, jealous devotion, she would have been overcome with horror at herself. To understand the state of her feelings, and to make allowance for her folly, it is necessary to take her as she was—a wild, ignorant child, with the uncontrolled impulses of childhood warring against the passionate heart of a woman.

She was happy, that winter, in her irresponsible way. Raoul was free. Once more he made a companion of her; not, it is true, as in the old boy and girl days, but still enough to relieve the lonely monotony of her life. If he was rather distant and absent-minded, separated from her, mentally, by a great gulf of experience, which prevented them from meeting quite on the old free-and-easy footing, she consoled herself by thinking that, in time, the gravity would wear off and the light-heartedness return. She could not understand that his boyhood was over for ever, and that to the man, with his deeper thoughts and feelings, she was a mere child whom he would not dream of associating with anything serious.

Not that he undervalued her sympathy. Without it, he would have been doubly forlorn. It rendered him, as she wished, in some measure dependent on her for that unspoken comfort for which the strongest of us will crave at times.

Denise had indeed left a rival behind her in the little Breton girl, with her weird beauty and passionate impulsiveness.

The day after Raoul's return from Paris he fetched Yvonne to come out with him in the *Bon Espoir*. He did not tell her where he had been, nor did she ask him. But she guessed that something had occurred to make him more resigned to his fate, more than ever determined to throw useless regrets to the winds, and live his life as much as possible as if Denise Lenard had never crossed his path.

It was this that made Yvonne so happy as they sailed together in the little boat which had always been such a safe and trusted friend to Raoul. "He had come back to her," her heart kept singing: "He had come back to her." Denise, with her baneful charms, had passed away out of their lives, and, with her, all the misery and vague longing and smothered passions of those last, changeful months.

"Pourquoi pleurer le temps passé?" she went on with her droning song; "Hélas! il ne revient point! Les petits oiseaux ne pleurent pas."

"Comme une plume sur l'eau," broke in Raoul's deep voice, full of cynical meaning; "l'amour des jeunes filles est léger."

Yvonne looked at him for a moment, then laughed and tossed back her head.

"Comme une pomme mûre sur une branche, l'amour des jeunes filles est solide," she sang joyously. "Comme une pomme piquée des vers, l'amour des jeunes filles est loyal."

"You are very gay, Yvonne," repeated Raoul.

"Yes. I told you why. To-day the winter has gone."

"Eh, bien! What if it has? For my part I rejoice to think that it has not gone for long. There is life in the winter; storm and tempest and danger. It makes it worth while to be a man. The

summer is for women. But say, Yvonne, is your father coming home this year?"

"Oh, yes. In May. I had almost forgotten. He will be here for a month, a week, a day; who can tell? He is like the waves of the sea. He does not know how to be still."

"I think I shall ask him to take me with him on his next cruise," said Raoul quietly. "I am getting tired of Camper. It is time I saw something of life; of other lands."

The light died suddenly out of the girl's eyes. She caught her breath and stared blankly at him, without speaking.

Raoul was not looking at her. His eyes were fixed on that motionless bank of cloud on the horizon.

"It is time we turned back," he said suddenly; "I have been absent-minded. If we do not take care we shall be caught in the storm before we can get home. Get her head round, Yvonne. It is no use trying to sail. The wind, such as it is, is dropping more and more. I must take the oars."

Far as eye could see, to westward, stretched the wide, unruffled ocean, still and melancholy as some vast lake; sea and sky one uniform sunless grey, except where the thundercloud hung in the distance, its edges slowly turning into a lurid copper-colour, as though some unseen flame from the nether-world was slowly and pitilessly scorching them. Now and then came a low, broken rumble, like the sound of guns from a great distance. Otherwise all was silent, still, dreamlike, as if the dead-calm sea and sky were lying in wait, with arms in rest, until the appointed signal for some great contest.

The little boat held steadily on its way. Yvonne had left her former post and was rowing in the bow, her strong, lithe arms keeping excellent time with the long, vigorous strokes of her companion. She had left off singing; when Raoul spoke she scarcely answered, appearing to require all her strength for the physical effort she was making.

They rowed thus for more than half an hour, and had made good progress in the time. But Raoul, who read the sky like a book, was not too well satisfied.

A great drop of rain fell splashing into the boat; a breath of cold wind came sighing across the sea, darkening its quiet surface.

"Rain," said Raoul, turning his head to look at the coming thundercloud. "Did you bring a cloak, Yvonne? We shall be drenched in another half-hour."

"It does not matter. I am not afraid of water. Is there going to be a storm?"

"There will be rain," he answered evasively; "and we are still a good way from home. But if this breeze keeps up we shall be able to hoist the sail. Are you tired?"

"Tired? No. This is nothing."

There were more drops of rain, big and heavy ; and another little gust of wind. The flame-colour was burning all over the lower edge of the thundercloud that had been gradually spreading over the sky, until the bulk of it hung, black as pitch, in a great dense mass above their heads, carrying with it a chill blast that swept past them with a shivering moan.

Raoul hoisted the sail and Yvonne resumed her place at the helm. She saw that his keen blue eyes were full of anxiety, lightly though he spoke.

Suddenly the whole sky seemed to be torn and rent asunder. There was one vivid flash of lightning, followed by a terrific clap of thunder. Then again all was silent.

"That is the prelude," said Raoul, coolly ; "I hope the rest will be as magnificent. Sapisti ! Here comes the rain."

Everything seemed to come ! Rain, wind, thunder, lightning. The sails flung out with a clap of delight as the wind caught them ; the little boat scudded away over the rising waves like an arrow loosed from the bow.

"We shall have to make for the Baie des Nains," said Raoul. "The wind is with us, and we have done it before. Keep her head steady, Yvonne. How do you like this ?"

"Splendid ! splendid !" cried the girl ; "I love it."

"It is life. There is nothing else like it, after all. That was a flash. They are lighting up our way as if we were making a royal progress ! Salut ! my good friends !" exclaimed Raoul, waving his hat with boyish enthusiasm : "We refuse your enmity."

Between them and Camper lay the rocky promontory where the Chapelle de Notre Dame du Salut stood, and where Yvonne had her home. By the time they gained this point the storm, which, as often happens on the Coast of Finisterre, had suddenly raged into fury, would make it a risky undertaking to attempt to pass it. Had he been alone Raoul would have thought nothing of it, or would have lain outside until the storm abated. But with Yvonne in his care it was a different matter.

On this side of the promontory lay a little bay or inlet known as the Baie des Nains, from the extreme narrowness of the opening into its sheltered waters, through which it was said in the country round that none but a dwarf in his pigmy boat could venture in safety.

To anyone unversed in the treacheries of the coast this little bay presented a seductive aspect. It was more or less protected from the virulence of the winds, forming a kind of basin of which the calm waters seemed to invite the unwary mariner to trust himself to them from the fury of the high seas. Repeated calamities had taught the Camper fishermen the fallacy of this expectation ; friendly as the bay itself might be, there lay a hydra in wait at its entrance that few cared to encounter ; and many a boat had lain out at sea the whole

night rather than venture within the treacherous circle of rocks forming the Baie des Nains.

Raoul, however, was a prey to no such fears. He had brought the *Bon Espoir* in and out of the little gulf a hundred times in perfect safety. He knew the track as well as he knew the walks in his garden at home. The only difficulty consisted in keeping the boat under control in the storm.

"You are not afraid of the Baie des Nains, are you?" he asked Yvonne presently. "If so——"

"I—afraid!" she laughed. "I am a Bretonne."

"Very well. Keep your eye on me, and do exactly what I tell you. You are always an obedient 'man at the helm,' and now you must be doubly so. I shall have enough to do managing the sails."

By this time the rain was pouring down in torrents; every instant there crashed the thunderous artillery of Heaven. All around was black and grim as night, the gloom lit up constantly by the piercing lightning that darted in a lurid zig-zag from zenith to horizon. The wind, coming in wild gusts, made the gallant little boat sway to and fro, and bound like a war-horse over the splashing foam.

Yvonne, patient and obedient at the helm, sat with her dark eyes fixed on Raoul's face. Presently he looked at her, and nodded encouragement.

"You are a true daughter of the sea, Yvonne," he said. "Monsieur le Capitaine ought to be proud of you."

"You will not go with him!" she said breathlessly, her face full of piteous entreaty; "You are not really going away? *Raoul!*"

"Ah—perhaps not! Who can say? Who wants me here?"

"*I do,*" she whispered passionately.

"Pauvre petite," he said kindly. "Are you so dull? You must come with us. We could not leave you behind. Now, Yvonne—attention. Keep cool. So—that will do it. A little more to the left! We shall be as safe as a baby in its cradle in a few minutes."

They were nearing the Baie des Nains. The narrow gulf leading into it was tossed and white with foam; one false motion of the hand at the helm would be enough to dash the boat on to the sharp rocks that lay hidden in wait for prey. Raoul trusted Yvonne; she had been there with him a score of times, and had learnt to understand his very glance. He often said that he would rather let her steer him through the most dangerous of passes than any fisherman in the place.

Her eyes were fixed on his face. Hands and heart were trembling, not with fear, but with an uncontrollable excitement.

Raoul, too, was not quite intent on their danger. Something in her last words, in her voice, in her poor little imploring face, had made his heart leap with a sudden new thought that, coming just then when all his old hopes were dead and buried, for a moment overcame his enforced calm and indifference.

Here, at his feet, was the love of a woman who would have given up everything in the world for his sake. He was alone—unhappy—bound only by the fragile fetters of social law to a woman who did not love him—who had forfeited his loyalty.

He looked up, and their eyes met in one of those long, passionate glances that will break down the barrier of years.

Then he roused himself with a start.

"What are you doing, Yvonne?" he exclaimed harshly. "*Starboard hard.*"

The helm had flown from her hands; there was a crash and shivering of timber; the little craft shuddered from bow to stern, swayed, and heeled over—and in another moment Yvonne and Raoul were swimming, for life or death, through the boiling surge.

CHAPTER XI.

A VISION.

MADEMOISELLE LENARD, that was? Ah, yes. I recollect. Contracted some eccentric marriage, did she not? And has since been divorced. One must not pin one's faith on the virtuous professions of these women; do I not always say so?"

"You utter truisms, chère Marquise. Mademoiselle Lenard was the comet of a season; the young men carried her portrait next their hearts. The rest goes without saying. What else can you expect?"

"So this is the ci-devant actress? Well, she is certainly presentable."

"Be candid, madame; she is more than presentable; she is divine," said Monsieur le Comte d'Edmond, as he moved to greet the new-comer.

"So! That is the way the wind blows," sniffed the Marquise, levelling her gold-rimmed lorgnette upon Madame de Kériadec as she advanced into the salon. "For the last three months he has scarcely spoken to Alphonsine, and before that I was already contemplating the trousseau."

"Ah! From what I have heard you may rest assured that Madame de Kériadec is the mot-de-l'enigme," responded the other. "But that signifies little. For, at least he cannot marry her."

"What does she mean by forcing her way into society, she who was on the stage not two years ago?" cried the Marquise with increased ire. "It is an impertinence. Ah! Monsieur de Caromont! We are just discussing this Madame de Kériadec. Are you, also, one of her admirers?"

"The greatest, Marquise. She is adorable. You never saw her act? Ah, it was well worth seeing. But no doubt our amiable hostess is preparing some little games for our diversion; you know that she has a passion for charades. And with Madame de Kériadec

here, it would be a sin to lose the opportunity of hearing her recite. We are in luck to-night."

Such, evidently, was the opinion of most of the Comtesse de Mersac's male guests. There was soon a little crowd hovering round Denise, laughing, joking, flattering; the same to-night as they had been many nights before, and would be for many nights to come.

Denise had wearied of it long ago. But on the whole it caused her less trouble than most things and sometimes even afforded her a spurious excitement, which she was beginning to suppose was the nearest approach to enjoyment attainable in this world.

This very lack of interest added to her charm; it suited her "type," and piqued her admirers into keener desire to arouse in her some spark of genuine emotion.

Anyone seeing her for the first time, in a salon full of the prettiest and wittiest women in Paris, herself shining brightest of all, would have imagined her very well content with her life and surroundings.

Raoul would hardly have recognised her. This self-possessed woman, in yellow satin, lounging back in her chair with a lazy consciousness that she was looking very beautiful, and that every glance from her indolently contemptuous eyes flew like a shaft to some susceptible heart, was a woman of the world, not a hot-headed girl like the Denise who had chafed and fretted at the restricted dulness of life at Camper. She only differed from the fashionable women around her in that she accepted all homage with a lofty nonchalance that sorely tried the *amour-propre* of certain gallants eager to ingratiate themselves into her favour; and because there was not even a pretence of sincerity in her dealings with the gay world in which she had chosen to cast her lot. For a woman to be worshipped by some dozen different persons, it is a foregone conclusion that she must be a humbug to eleven out of the twelve, if not to them all.

But Madame de Kériadec's form of humbug was of the most honest kind (if one may use such a paradox), and not intended to deceive anyone. Since she went into society she determined to make the best of it, and to beguile the time as best suited her fancy. To be lively, and bewitching, and admired, was all part of the wearisome game; but she did not endeavour to conceal that she was bored to extinction, and only indulged in such frivolity because she could find no more amusing substitute.

"If I could return to the stage I might be happy," she used to think. "But there is no question of that. To all things there is a limit, and that is where I find the limit to my freedom."

And why? That, none could understand. She had separated from her husband, and was virtually her own mistress. Judging from past events, surely it weighed very little with her what Raoul thought of her actions; henceforth, what would he be to her but a reminiscence?

"Yes ; I know. I understand that I am an imbecile," she replied to any remonstrances. "But my mind is made up, once and for all. Do not worry me on the subject."

For my part, I am inclined to think that this determination was prompted, unknown to herself, by some dim sense of honour and faith ; some unreasoning loyalty to the man to whom she was bound, in the sight of God, though by no ties of mutual love and sympathy. Perhaps, too, there was a sudden wild fear of the consequences of her recklessness, now that the crisis had come, and a half superstitious resolution not to widen the gulf by any irreparable fault on her side.

This, at least, is how she tried to explain to herself the inconsistency in her conduct ; and if there was a deeper, underlying motive, she was too blind or too proud to recognise it.

It was now the end of January. For the last two months she had given herself up to a whirl of gaiety—dances, theatres, suppers ; late hours by night ; vapid idleness by day. One or two leaders of society, instigated by Comte d'Edmond, had "taken her up," and made her "the fashion." Since she left Camper she had been in the midst of jealousies, rivalries, intrigues. She had not made a single friend, in the true sense of the term ; eleven hours out of the twelve were deplorably dull ; she disliked her acquaintances and despised herself. On reconsideration, it seemed scarcely worth while to have quarrelled with Raoul if this was all she received in exchange.

Yet why should it be thus ? Why did she turn with such distaste from all that she had once longed for ?

This question puzzled her continually ; though the answer was simple enough, and one that acted as an anodyne to good old Madame Lenard's tender heart, which had suffered untold pangs over the shortcomings of her wilful niece.

Denise's girlish desires had been those of ignorance. Now that she understood the frivolity and vice that governed what she used to consider a life of harmless excitement, her better nature rose up and asserted itself ; asserted itself with a strength that often made her writhe with shame when she looked back on the folly of her past conduct. If some of the women with whom she now associated deserved opprobrium for lowering the standard of womanly virtue in the eyes of the world, did she not equally merit censure for lowering the standard in the eyes of, at least, one person ; and for having flung away her chance of making—or keeping—at least *one* man a little better than his fellows ?

It was this remorse, this inconvenient conscientiousness that ruined Denise's prospects of amusing herself, or of alleviating her troubles, by rushing wildly into a life of dissipation. It is, in truth, such a poor, played-out subterfuge of the unhappy, that it is a marvel how so many weary souls still flatter themselves that for them, at least, it contains the blessed Lethe.

Every morning that winter Denise had congratulated herself on being no longer shivering at Camper, with wild winds rocking the Beacon Tower, and wet mists from the sea blurring the landscape like a dull, grey shroud. As for Raoul, she thought of him as little as possible. But when his memory was forced upon her, as, for instance, at night before she fell asleep, it was always as she had last seen him—in danger, fighting against wind and wave in absolute carelessness of life. Often, when she came home tired after a forced excitement, she had a horrible nightmare, in which Raoul was struggling against a huge, white-crested breaker, from which there was no chance of escape.

She was angry and ashamed at her weakness ; but argued from it that she had shown discretion in leaving Camper before its dreary loneliness had utterly destroyed her nervous system ; and the more such grim fancies assailed her, the more she sought alleviation in outward gaiety. Sometimes she succeeded in this well enough ; but there were occasions on which her whole soul revolted against the tone of the society in which she mixed, with a dreary conviction that in time she, too, must inevitably be swept away in the current, and become as lax and empty-headed as the rest.

She experienced this feeling very strongly on the evening of the Comtesse de Mersac's reception. It happened to be a heavy, sultry night, strangely so for the time of year ; the air charged with electricity ; and Denise was afflicted with one of those emotional temperaments that are so keenly susceptible to atmospheric influences.

Her nerves felt strung to the highest pitch ; her eyes and cheeks glowing with a feverish brightness that enhanced her loveliness ; there was a restless expectancy about her that belied her usual half-assumed indolence.

" You are in the humour to act, to-night," said d'Edmond, after greeting her with the easy familiarity of an intimate friend. " And that is fortunate, madame, for I am commissioned by our hostess to implore you to favour us with a recitation. Madame de St. Breteuil has organised some charades. That we shall be bored by them is as certain as that she will forget her rôle at the most critical moment. It is for you to restore us, by a *bonne-bouche* kept for the last."

" Eh bien ! reply to Madame la Comtesse, with my respects, that I am not in the humour to supply her guests with a *bonne-bouche*."

" Impossible. You are not to be let off. We have been too indulgent to you already. Night after night you evade us with, ' I am tired'—' not in the humour'—excuse after excuse. Why, you would not even assist in the Marquise de B.'s theatricals. Everyone is wondering what has come to you."

" I detest amateur theatricals," answered Denise : " quarrels at rehearsal ; at least three stage-managers to obey and conciliate ; Madame this envious of Madame that, because her rôle contains

some more telling passage than is in her own ; cabals and discontents without end ; and finally, a lamentable and incontestible failure. Those are the conditions of your amateur theatricals."

" You were not so bitter at Camper," he rejoined. " If I recollect aright you were the keenest of us all."

" Ah, at Camper. One is easily distracted at so dead-alive a place. Besides, I have forgotten the trick of it. It never was more than that with me, though some generous people were kind enough to credit me with talent. I could not act now if my life depended on it."

" Is that true ? I should have fancied that you had power, now, to act as you never dreamed of acting in the old days. You have had your experience."

" I have bought it. Bought it with my old enthusiasms. Really, I think now, of all things, that they are not worth the trouble."

" The *on dit* is, that you have an attachment."

" Then the *on dit* is egregiously false in its calculations. Briefly, I do not intend to recite to-night."

Upon d'Edmond reporting this decision there was a general chorus of remonstrance. There seemed to be a unanimous determination not to let her off this time. Some had a sincere desire to see and admire her talent. Others (chiefly of her own sex) were resolved not to let her past be forgotten. She had been an actress, no one could deny that ; and no matter how irreproachable she had been, this fact kept her on a level below that of her present companions, which she must not be allowed to forget. As a matter of fact, Denise was more proud than ashamed of her acting days, knowing that she had done more honest work during her short professional career than these society dolls would do in the whole course of their lives.

Nevertheless, she did not intend to break her rule. Once yield, and the old love of her art would arise as vigorously as ever, perhaps not to be resisted. And she was just enough conscious of her own moral weakness to know that though strong enough to *flee* temptation she had not always strength to resist it.

" What ridiculous affectation," said the Marquise, in an aside to d'Edmond. " No woman of the world would have such gauche manners when asked to oblige her hostess. You must really induce her to give in."

D'Edmond felt annoyed with Denise for her obstinacy. It kept her on an irreproachable pinnacle whereon he did not care to see any of his friends ; it placed them so far out of his reach !

" Oh, I cannot. Do not tease me," said Denise, impatiently, as he renewed his protests. " I do not feel up to it to-night ; this sultry weather makes me perfectly foolish. There ! was not that thunder ? Ah ! I wish I had gone home before it began. It is stifling here."

" Madame, we will not listen to excuses. Anyone may see that you are in the mood for inspiration. You have never looked so

beautiful—pardon ! Do not annihilate me. If you object, I will never utter another compliment in your hearing.—But seriously, what can you urge against it ? Are we not all friends here ? It is not like a public appearance. Believe me, you are nursing a chimera. Your husband has by this time completely lost all interest in your actions. It is part of your bargain."

Denise shrugged her shoulders, pouted, and muttered that she had no other motives than fatigue and disinclination. But her heightened colour showed that the thrust had gone home ; and the Marquise rushed in to follow up d'Edmond's advantage by another poisoned dart.

" Doubtless Madame de Kériadec fears another esclandre—like that of which we all heard, some months ago. But rest assured, madame, that in the salon of Madame de Mersac all interlopers will be turned from the door, even should they come in the guise of jealous husbands. Is it not so, Comte ?"

Denise sprang up, with a low, passionate exclamation.

" Ah, well ! Since you will have it so, I am ready," she said recklessly. " Comte, you may signify to Madame de Mersac that I am at her service."

She flung herself back into her chair, and with half-closed eyes waited until she should be called forward. She did not conceal her annoyance, and resolutely kept her head averted from her companions, on the pretext of trying to recall some lines appropriate for recitation.

" What is it to be ? Tragedy or comedy ?" asked d'Edmond.

" Tragedy," she answered shortly. " Who can talk comedy in a thunderstorm ?"

" Do not be afraid. It is passing off. The last clap was fainter. Ah ! Here comes de Mersac for you."

There was quite a little flutter of excitement when Madame de Kériadec was led forward by the master of the house.

" Madame de Kériadec has kindly consented to give us a recitation from 'Bajazet,'" he announced ; adding, with a suave bow to Denise : " Roxane will never have been more worthily represented."

" Merci, monsieur."

For a moment, she stood looking upwards, her brows drawn together, as though seeking inspiration. She looked very beautiful—for the time being lifted out of herself by an influx of emotion ; and when she began to speak, her voice seemed to vibrate and tremble with passion.

" Ma rivale à mes yeux s'est enfin déclarée
Voilà sur quelle foi je m'étais assurée !
Depuis six mois entiers j'ai cru que, nuit et jour,
Ardente elle veillait au soin de mon amour :
Et c'est moi qui, du sien ministre trop fidèle,
Semble depuis six mois ne veiller que pour elle ;
Qui me suit . . . qui me suit . . . "

Her voice ceased abruptly. Her rapt eyes were strained, as though they saw some dread sight far away. Her lips were parted, like those of one in an anguish of terror.

For a moment the spectators believed it to be part of her rôle, and were beginning a little burst of applause when a rolling crash of thunder broke the silence, rousing Denise from her strange, weird abstraction.

"Ah!" she cried, covering her eyes with her hands. "That terrible thunder! It kills me." And she would have fallen had not d'Edmond sprung forward and helped her to a chair.

"Bah! How silly I am," she said, trying to regain her composure. "You must excuse me, my friends. I am tired; and I am never able to control myself in a storm. If you will permit me, Comtesse, I will send for my carriage."

"Are you sure you are not ill? . . . Did you feel faint? . . . Did you see anything to alarm you? . . . On my word, madame, one would have said you saw the earth opening before you."

"I am very foolish," she answered, smiling, and shrugging her shoulders in the old nonchalant way. "Do not any of you worry on my account. Eh bien! Yes . . . I did have a kind of illusion. I am so easily excited, you know. I imagined I saw a storm—a wreck—a man drowning. Some bêtise of the kind. I assure you it was nothing. My brain was overtaxed. You see that you must not ask me to act again."

D'Edmond was, as usual, ready to escort her to her carriage.

"A vision? That is interesting," he said, as he led her downstairs. "A wreck—and a man drowning. Might one be permitted to ask if it was a friend in danger?"

"It was not a friend."

"Merely a man who is nothing to you?"

"Merely a man who is nothing to me," she assented, but flushed, nevertheless, up to the roots of her hair.

D'Edmond watched her carriage drive away, then stood a few moments out in the street, smoking his cigar meditatively.

"So!" he said to himself; "an hysterical fit in which the despised one rises to the heroic on account of an imaginary peril. C'est imbecile!"

CHAPTER XII.

"SOUVENT FEMME VARIE."

"My dear child! What have you been doing to yourself? You are like a ghost. One would say you had been up all night, seeing apparitions," exclaimed Madame Lenard, as Denise came languidly into the salon next morning, looking very white and depressed.

Denise rubbed her hands over the little wood fire.

"Ah! How I detest the winter. It is cold enough for Siberia. And just listen to the wind."

"The thunderstorm last night has upset the weather. But that need not make you look like this. My child, confide in me. You are ill—unhappy. What is it?"

"I slept badly; and had disagreeable dreams. That is all. But I am rather depressed in consequence. Oh, la, la! I wish it were summer. I am sick of Paris and Parisians. Cannot we fly away to fresh climes, where we know nobody, dear aunt?"

"You—a Parisienne—to give vent to such sentiments! *Fi donc!*" exclaimed Madame Lenard disdainfully.

"I am Parisienne in this, that I love variety," said Denise. "Life, as it is at present, is tiresome beyond expression. Oh, for the old days, and the beloved theatre."

"You would never be happy under any circumstances. You are the incarnation of discontent."

"But you love me, all the same. And it is your fault that I am as I am. You should not have spoilt me so you and my uncle."

"I know. I know," sighed her aunt. "It was a deplorable mistake. I shall never pardon myself—never. It ought to be a warning to you, Denise, if ever you have any chil—"

"But I shall not, so that is all right," said Denise quickly. "And the world will be spared another disgrace like me. Let us be grateful for small mercies."

Madame Lenard shook her head and murmured dolefully, "Hélas," as she always did after one of Denise's flippant remarks, and signified her disapproval by dropping the conversation.

Her heart ached for the girl, and for the young husband whose life she had spoilt. But it was beyond her arts to find a remedy. The future lay with the de Kériadecs themselves. No one else could mend or mar the present uncomfortable state of affairs. Sometimes, deceived by Denise's assumed gaiety, she began to think that she really had no feelings, but was simply a heartless butterfly, who cared for nothing but her own comfort and enjoyment.

"If only she were not so provokingly pretty!"

But there it was! She was young, beautiful, charming. Absolutely alone and independent; a woman who lived apart from her husband, owing to an unfortunate "incompatibility of temper." It was lamentable. What dangers beset her, what trials, what temptations!

To-day she looked ill and unhappy. Poor Madame Lenard began to dread all manner of misfortunes. Being of a sentimental turn of mind, she imputed most of the troubles of young people to love-sorrows; and now, the thought that worried her was that perhaps Denise had a grief of this nature, and that the cause of it was *not* Raoul de Kériadec.

"Tiresome, tiresome child! How I should like to be angry with

her, and tell her how scandalously she has behaved," thought Madame Lenard, trying to steel her heart; then, for the hundredth time, relenting as she looked at the face she loved, weak though she knew herself to be, better than anything else on earth.

Denise was lying back in a low chair, her hands clasped behind her head, her little feet, in the daintiest of red morocco shoes, stretched before her on the white rug, and her brows knit together as if she were trying to solve some perplexing problem.

"Do you know, my aunt, I am seriously thinking of running down to Camper for one night; just to vary the monotony," she said presently, stretching out her arms with a yawn. "I die of ennui here."

Madame Lenard raised her eyebrows, without replying. If Denise chose to jest on serious subjects she did not mean to encourage her. Not for one moment did she expect her to act upon her words. Denise was often outrageously flippant, but so far her actions had fallen very much below her threatened intentions.

"I think if I were again to realise how outlandish it is down there I might, once more, duly appreciate Paris," went on Denise. "At any rate, if Raoul and I were to meet, there would be a little excitement of some kind. Oh—a splendid idea strikes me! Why should not he and I change places? I stay at Camper for a month; Raoul come to Paris? You say I am too frivolous; and I am sure Raoul is not frivolous enough. My plan would give us both the proper leaven. But, oh, how dull I should be under the régime. He would have the advantage over me."

"I wish he would try it! On my faith, I do," cried Madame Lenard, losing her temper. "Perhaps you would be sorry when you had lost him for good. And that *would* be the result, let me tell you, if he became like you. You would then despise him as he despises you."

"Despises me—Raoul?" cried Denise; "I should like to see it. But you, too, are against me. It is unfair."

"I should have imagined that you had enough new friends to make it a matter of insignificance to you what your old ones think. Whether they are such good friends is for you to decide. Without doubt they are more amusing. But we shall see. Are not some of them coming to *déjeuner* to day? I think I hear voices outside."

"Ah! I had forgotten," and Denise jumped up to scan her pale face in the looking-glass over the mantelpiece.

"It is annoying to look like this," she murmured, rubbing her cheeks; "they will give me no peace until they have found out the cause."

The next minute she had turned to meet her friends, laughing and chatting with all her wonted vivacity. As it happened, they were none of the new companions alluded to by Madame Lenard, but

the familiar trio, Comte d'Edmond, Madame de Fréville, and young de Caromont ; nevertheless, the old lady treated them with a certain coldness. She was well enough accustomed to a Bohemian freedom and merriment, but the friends her husband admitted to his house were very different from these fast society people, who were merely noisy without being in any way amusing or witty.

"How Denise can submit to them!" she wondered. "Léonie de Fréville has no more pretension to refinement than a lady's maid ; and de Caromont would still be at college if *I* were his mother."

But Denise could not long sustain her false spirits. She became nervous and absent-minded. She could not eat ; and the colour she had rubbed into her cheeks was as transient as a bubble.

Such unusual depression did not long escape the inquisitorial gaze of her companions. They had come there bent on discovering the cause of her strange conduct the preceding evening ; and Madame de Fréville was not likely to be restrained by any overstrained feelings of delicacy from putting the most point-blank questions and insisting on an answer.

"Ah, by the way, Denise," she began suddenly, "the whole world is talking of you. It is reported that you had a vision last night at the de Mersac's reception. Is it true? I am all curiosity. Come, confide in us. We are amongst friends."

"Oh, that? It was nothing," said Denise. "A mere faintness."

"No, no; you confessed more than that at the time. Madame Lenard, perhaps you can enlighten us?"

"I? I know nothing about it. What was it, my child? Why did you not tell me?"

"Because, as I have said, there was nothing to tell," said Denise impatiently, and blushing vividly. "I was upset by the thunder. Please do not allude to it. I am ashamed of my childishness. Talk of something else. Comte, have you nothing to say?"

"Ah—well—yes, the weather. What a terrific day we are having. It must recall to you the winter gales at Camper."

"Oh, yes; and that reminds me," broke in Madame de Fréville ; "Someone did mention that your vision had something to do with a wreck. Was it so? And pray, who was the fortunate individual who could rouse your sympathies so strongly? You see we have all assumed that there *was* an individual in the case."

"And what if I say there was not, my dear romantic Léonie?"

"I shall not believe you. One does not go into hysterics over a mere wreck. We know better than that."

"Most likely the scene was Camper, and the individual, Monsieur de Kériadec," said de Caromont, who always blurted out the wrong thing.

"Or Monsieur de Caromont himself," replied Denise lightly ; "that would account for my agitation, would it not?"

"I incline to de Caromont's view," put in d'Edmond; "only it is curious that a mere fancy should have so affected Madame de Kériadec."

"Enough of this bêtise. Cannot we talk of someone else than Denise?" exclaimed Madame Lenard, struggling to be heard. "Can anyone tell me if it is true that Madame St. Roche is selling her jewels to defray her son's debts? I have always said that Maurice is a scapegrace."

But her well meant efforts were useless. Madame de Fréville had a little spite against Denise, such as one pretty woman is apt to have against another, and she enjoyed putting her at a disadvantage.

At the same time, for the sake of human nature it is to be hoped that none of them would have pursued the subject further if they could have understood what Denise was suffering from their pertinacity.

She was undergoing actual torture. The strange scene that had flashed before her mental vision the night before haunted her with strange persistency. It had kept her awake all night. How could she sleep, with that horrible presentiment hanging over her and repeating over and over again in her ears that perhaps, at that very time, Raoul was tossing on the fierce Atlantic waves in his little craft, never to be seen again until his corpse was washed ashore in the storm? All the time her friends were mocking and questioning her, she was momentarily expecting to hear the tidings that she was a widow—freed, at last, from the fetters against which she had so fiercely rebelled. It was little wonder that she at last lost control over herself and showed that underneath her mask of idle indifference lay the old hot, impulsive temper of her girlhood.

D'Edmond's remark, "I do not see why it should have so much affected Madame de Kériadec," stung her with a keen sense of the indignity of her position, which laid her open to such undisguised imputations of dislike to her husband; and though she laughingly shrugged her shoulders, d'Edmond saw that he had blundered, and was preparing to remedy his mistake, when Madame de Fréville rushed in with:

"Oh, have no fear on that point, Denise. We all know that Monsieur de Kériadec has a guardian angel to keep him from danger. That wild little Breton girl will have lured him into a safe haven, rest assured. Ah! He is a clever fellow, that husband of yours, Denise. Not but what it is perfectly justifiable. I should expect nothing else of my good Paul."

"Ah! so that is the way the wind lies?" cried de Caromont. "I have been dense. Now I recollect several occasions at Camper where they two, posing as martyrs, fled from our pernicious society. She was pretty, that little Mademoiselle Hévin."

"I think you forget that you are speaking of my husband," interrupted Denise suddenly.

The blood was rushing hotly through her veins; her heart was bursting with unreasoning passion. Was it true, what they were saying? Impossible! He could not, he *dared* not transfer his love from her to a wild little girl like Yvonne!

"Oh, my dear, that is understood," answered Madame de Fréville. "Being one's husband makes very little difference. And we all know he is not good enough for you. Often enough you have implied as much yourself."

"I find I was mistaken. It is I who am not good enough for him," said Denise, greatly agitated. "Let us at least be honest."

"Yes; yes. Be tranquil. We all of us comprehend," said d'Edmond, trying to soothe her, and really intending to say nothing objectionable. "Only, in affairs of the heart goodness is at a discount. We love where Destiny tells us, and that is not always where we ought. We did not mean to offend you, madame. It is only what you have led us to suppose; if we are wrong, I, for one, apologise from my heart."

"You are wrong, then," she said in a low, excited voice, rising as she spoke, and looking at her companions with a kind of defiance whilst she made what seemed to her, in some sort, a public atonement to Raoul. "You are very wrong if you think I do not love my husband. More than that, I have made arrangements to return to him at once—to-day—this afternoon if possible. You will understand from this," she added, trying to speak gaily, "that, being a woman, I have an amount of packing to do before I start; I must, therefore, beg you to excuse me if I break up our little party now. I thank you, my friends, for your kindness to me whilst I have been in Paris."

D'Edmond was the first to recover from his mortified surprise. Saying that he would not for a moment impede madame in her preparations, he saluted her with a profound and half-mocking bow, and left the room, followed by de Caromont and Madame de Fréville, who could scarcely wait until they were out of hearing to make some not very complimentary remarks on the imbecility of poor dear Madame de Kériadec.

After they had gone, Madame Lenard took Denise's feverish hands in hers, and looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Is it true?" she asked. "Not an hysterical folly after your excitement and your sleepless night? Are you really going?"

"Yes, yes. I cannot wait any longer. Let me go by the next train. If I find him still—still alive—it may be that my love has come too late to be of any value. But I cannot let him die without knowing that it has come at last," she cried, bursting into wild tears. "For he will die. I saw it—I have had a warning—a conviction. And if I am too late, he will never know that I love him with all my heart and soul."

(To be concluded.)

THE DISCOVERY OF THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE.

AN old desolate garret, in an old desolate house. The walls were mouldy with a damp, green mould ; the little lattice window with its deep side-ports and sill was dim with dirt, and dark with the ivy that grew outside. The deal boards of the floor were strewn with a few dry rushes, which hardly attempted to hide the spots beneath. And these were spots and stains of all kinds ; green spots and blue stains ; spots that looked like blood, and stains that looked like fire. One large charred blotch marked where the oil of vitriol had upset and left the traces of its action ; another, where the contents of a retort had exploded, and falling while hot on the floor, had for a moment set it in flame. Tables and shelves covered with bottles and retorts filled the room. A small furnace with crucibles heaped up beside it showed that the alchemist, whoever he was, had not spared expense or trouble in fitting up his laboratory. An instrument, contrived with considerable skill with lenses of various powers, showed also that he was not ignorant of the power of the great agent : Light. While on the floor amongst the rushes lay a large box, with knobs and drawers and wheels of all kinds, the object of which is uncertain.

"Grandpapa," said a little golden-haired fairy, peeping in at the door. "Grandpapa, look here. What's this?"

An old, old man turned round in answer to the query. He was not dirty ; neither was he dressed in an old snuff-coloured suit. True, his fingers were slightly stained ; for in old age at times the fingers tremble ; but at all events he had been punished for his carelessness, since the acids that stained had also burnt him.

"What have you got hold of, little one ?" said the philosopher in a mellow voice ; the one trace of his youth that he still retained. "What a dirty old box. Open it."

"It won't open," said the child, in a voice which expressed at once dissatisfaction, wonder and certainty. "I've tried and tried."

"Just so ; it won't," replied the philosopher, half to himself. But he was thinking of another secret beyond this old box.

"Well, fairy," he continued, "leave the box with me and I will try it again—I want to think now." So the child left the room, almost pouting at the loss of her wonder.

The old man sat on in a brown study. He had given much of his lifetime to the pursuit of this flying phantom—the Philosopher's Stone. In the earlier part of his career he had been in India, and India was then a land of romance and wonders. Dim hints and misty warnings that he had heard there had confirmed him in his

passion for the science he had long leaned to. Coming home, he had married, and now lived in this topmost garret, while his son and daughter-in-law with their family kept the rest of the house for him.

"All in vain, I think," said he. "All as useless as this old mystery," he groaned to himself; and kicked the box as he spoke.

It sprang open. He was half frightened, the thing had happened so unexpectedly. Then recovering himself he stooped down and picked up the box.

"Ah! lined with asbestos: that promises well. Come, little Fay, you have unearthed a treasure. Good gracious!"

The old man exclaimed aloud in his surprise. The old box was made of gold—solid gold. Crusted, and, apparently, intentionally so, with dirt and a thin coating of some amalgam; yet beyond doubt beneath lay the Queen of metals herself. His interest was now at boiling point. He placed the box on the table, and with a penknife carefully picked at the contents, for there was some black substance within.

At last, with the tenderest care, he drew from it an old manuscript, and placed it on the table at his side. Then he looked again in the box, and could see nothing except one or two dark stains on the bottom and sides. No; this old manuscript was all it contained.

"I wonder who wrote it? I wonder what he put it there for?" meditated the old man, glancing at the golden box. Then he eagerly turned to the manuscript. It was as dry as a bone. The first page that the alchemist turned broke across like scorched paper. It must be, it was, very old. "This won't do; we must handle it more carefully," he muttered, and he turned each folio with a penknife.

There were seventy-five pages in all—closely written in that peculiarly beautiful manuscript which was only begotten of long practice in the Scriptorium of a monastery. When he came to the last page he looked to find some note by the author. His eyes gleamed as he looked—he had indeed seen a name. Written in the same careful writing was this word—

"Gravimus."

For the next quarter of an hour the old man sat staring vacantly.

It may be that some account of the man whose name made such an impression on the alchemist may not be unacceptable, for with the loss of the major portion of his writings he has also lost the greater part of his reputation.

Gravimus was a Spanish monk who flourished about 1050 A.D. His writings are distinguished by a certain crudeness of exposition and unvarnished distinctness of expression which marks the man's character. The fragments which remain to us are full of a strange kind of learning, far commoner in the days of the schoolmen than two centuries earlier. Of the man himself we know but little. One incident alone remains of his earlier life.

He tells us how one spring morning he left his village home, and rushed away, pursued by the village rabble. Not two miles from the place a stream ran violently along between the steep banks, and runs to this day. Into this the boy plunged, hoping, as he says, with the torrent to wash away the contamination of his earlier life.

It did so ; but he soon sinned sufficiently to stain his soul black again. While employed as clerk in the court of the Emperor Otho II., he betrayed his master, then on one of his Apulian expeditions ; fell into the hands of bandits, who were only deterred by fear of the Papal malediction from putting their captives to death.

With unexampled audacity he again presented himself at the Imperial court, and, strange to say, was again received into favour.

He himself tells the tale of his last and most terrible treachery.

As the pupil of Gerbert, he was even then one of the most learned necromancers of the day. He knew, above all, the composition and action of vegetable poisons, and, doubtless, had not his great work " *De Venenis* " been lost, much of the mystery which surrounds the mediæval period of the social history of Italy might be dispelled.

He tells how he was employed by Stephania to prepare the poison with which that fair avenger destroyed the Emperor ; and then, blackening even this record of treachery, he turned, viper-like, on the hand that had fed him—still he tells the story of his own shame—and administered the same poison to Gerbert, then Pope Sylvester II., who is more generally supposed to have died by the hand of Stephania.

With all his vileness the man was not without a certain rough kind of honesty. The information contained in his writings is always reliable, which is more than can be said for other pretenders to chemical knowledge. The old alchemist in discovering this manuscript, in all probability written by the very hand of the old monk, had lighted on a wonder, which was valuable, quite apart from any intrinsic worth it might have. As for that intrinsic value, it would be well to examine at once, to see what it might be, lest the ancient pages should crumble from exposure to the air.

Hour after hour the old man sat there reading with difficulty the crabbed Latin interspersed with obsolete alchemical terms. Again and again the little child came and knocked at the door. Grandpapa said " presently," and the messenger went back again.

At last the door opened and the old man came out. At dinner everyone noticed how radiant his face was, and how silent his tongue ; but he stopped all inquiries, and immediately the meal was finished returned to his room.

" Surely," he said softly as he shut the door, " I have my queen at last in my grasp. Oh, my fair gold, to have escaped all but this old monk, and to come to your lover at last ! "

He flung open the little lattice window and thrust his head out, hoping to lengthen the enjoyment of his discovery. Then he quickly

drew it in again, lest time should fail him. The man's nerves were overstrung with excitement; he was well-nigh mad with joy. He snatched up the tome and read this sentence aloud, that he might hear the words themselves. The passage was in Latin, and may be translated thus :

" For know this, my reader, thou shalt by my means find a certain gaseous vapour stifling in odour. Take then of aqua pura one sextarius (about a pint) and do as I shall bid thee. Place therein oil of vitriol, whereby it shall become hot, even unto boiling. Then place the end of a damp cord in it and tie the other extremity unto a high tree in a churchyard. If a storm of lightning shall come to pass, mayhap thou shalt perceive the gas arising from the bowl. Or, do thou this : take a basin (again sextarius) of the oil of vitriol, and add thereto ferrum, and shortly a seething shall happen, and the gas shall arise.

" Now this gas is the determinate of all things, wherein the ancient philosophers did greatly err, etc. etc. And as all things are built up" (he uses the Greek word ἀνοικοδομέω strangely enough) " of this gas, so may all things also be returned to it.

" Wherefore then having taken such a volume of this gas, as thou dost require — "

" The next sentence is in cypher," mused the alchemist. " I wonder how to find the key? Unless I can discover it the rest is useless. Horrible!" And he read on.

" This shalt thou do to find gold, the Queen of Metals. For myself from the way that I learned it, I may not use it; for neither may the treasure-finder find treasure for himself; nor the prophet prophecy his own end. But I am sure that this way will arrive at a good termination, for this iron box my servant turned to gold at my directions, and him I slew lest he should reveal the secret."

" What a villain!" ejaculated the old man. But he knew too much of human nature to be surprised at the inconsistency of the old author in killing his servant to preserve his secret, and at the same time—fearful that it should perish—publishing it in this book; or, after having published it, writing the vital part of the recipe in a difficult cypher. It was just such a trifling with common sense as the old alchemist himself under like circumstances would have been the first to indulge in.

He sat down again at his little desk, and settled himself to the weary labour of discovering a clue to the cypher. He numbered the letters and found that they were in the ordinary proportion of Latin vowels and consonants; there had been therefore no substitution in value. Hour after hour passed, and the watchman at intervals made his customary cry: " Half past eleven and a rainy night;" " Half past twelve and the rain hath stopped;" but still the old man worked on, almost in despair.

At last his face lit up with a triumphant satisfaction. He was on

the track of the secret. The preceding sentences, read backwards, themselves explained it. Afraid lest the clue should remain undiscovered, the old monk had written a memorandum to this effect in sympathetic ink at the end, and the heat of the old man's dry hand had just brought the characters into sight.

He trembled with joy. For a moment he thought of going to sleep with the secret discovered, and reserving the delight of the actual experiment of the marvellous fact until he awoke, refreshed, on the morrow. Then he remembered that he might never wake again, and that thought drove all others away. He would that very evening bring the wonder out of darkness into light.

Slowly he spelt out the recipe, word by word, clasping his tremulous hands together at the close of every sentence, to suppress, as it were, the excitement that almost forced him to shout his joy aloud. How often had he himself been on the verge of this discovery; how often others; and its very simplicity rendered it certain of concealment. Read out this? not he. Walls had ears, even in the dead of night. So he contented himself with poring over the mystery, now a mystery no longer, with very great delight and wonderment.

All the materials he needed he had by him. The one instrument necessary was complicated; but that he had also. The strange machine of knobs and wheels, already mentioned, would with a slight alteration be sufficient. He made his arrangements, and then sat down once more to gloat over the manuscript.

For an hour or more he sat thus, making notes of his evening's work—for he was a methodical old man—reading, and examining the curious fretted spring of the golden box. Then he rose and opened a small cupboard. On the single shelf lay an ingot of zinc, covered with dust. He had placed it there twenty-seven and a half years ago, when he first began his researches, reserving it for the first actual experiment with the philosopher's stone, should he ever discover it. He had often opened the door and gazed at the ingot, but never before had he touched it, since the day, those many years ago, when he first laid it there. Now he took it down and placed it on the table.

Then he went to the machine, and pulling out a small drawer lined with glass, took from it an oblong mould which had formed within it. The mould was of a transparent substance, the colour greenish grey with a certain metallic lustre. He held it up to the morning sun, which at that moment struck through the grimy panes, and instantly the whole room was irradiated with a glorious hundred-coloured light, conspicuous among which was a strong beam of rich golden yellow. The old man looked at it earnestly, and then laid the stone quietly down on the table.

"This, then," said he, "is the Philosopher's Stone."

Then he sank back in his old worm-eaten chair and burst into a violent passion of weeping. This was the "At last."

In a few minutes he recovered, rose again from his chair, and made

the first experiment. He touched the ingot. Instantly the whole metal changed colour. It flushed an almost coppery-red, and then gradually subsided into the rich, soft, golden colour of the purest gold. "That is enough," said the old man with a smile.

He had been preternaturally still ever since the actual discovery of the substance, and after this first success he was quietly laying the stone down again with the pious words: "In all time of our wealth, good Lord deliver us," when a strange and terrible thing happened.

The old man's hand was yet on the stone, when its extremity touched the old book in which he had read the secret of its creation. On the instant a flash, as of lightning, sprang from the point of contact. The alchemist fell heavily to the floor, his body half charred to cinder: the book was dust: the stone resolved to its original gases. The creator, the creation, and the power of creating had alike been shattered to fragments in an instant.

By the kindness of Sir Hugh I have been able to give this account of the last experiment of the old alchemist. He adds the few following particulars, which explain partly the preciseness of his account of the philosopher's last moments.

Sir Hugh's father, the alchemist's son, not hearing the old man retire to bed, sat up to await him. He had fallen asleep in his chair, and the sun which shot over the philosopher's stone also woke him from his slumbers. He ran up to the garret, and from outside the door heard the last words of his father and then his heavy fall. He dashed open the door, in fear and trembling of some great accident, and rushed in. The golden ingot lay beside the golden box on the table; the machine was on the floor; and across the dry rushes lay the old alchemist, with a strange smile on his face, the light of the rising sun flooding his charred body.

They have never touched the room since. The fatal gold lies beside the golden box—each under a thick coat of dust, through which the metal gleams dimly. When I entered the room the other day it was the first time for nearly a century that a human foot had crossed the threshold. The machine was still on the floor, with the little glass-lined drawer half shut in. I might not touch it, but I hazarded a guess that it was used for combining substances, for which great accuracy, both of time and proportion, was necessary. I thought, too, that I detected some charred fragments of paper amongst the dust on the table, but of this I cannot be certain. But I did find, hidden beneath a thick coating of dust, some notes of this last fatal experiment, and the stump of a quill pen, much gnawed, with which they were made.

G. S. ELLAM.



A POET'S PLACE.

MID the green old woods of England
 There stands a princely hall,
 Where sunbeams pass through painted glass
 On oaken floors to fall,
 And pictured dame and knight of fame
 Watch from its carven wall.

And there, three hundred years ago,
 A poet found a place,
 Made free to roam that noble home
 By its proud owner's grace,
 And at a while, to catch a smile
 From its sweet lady's face.

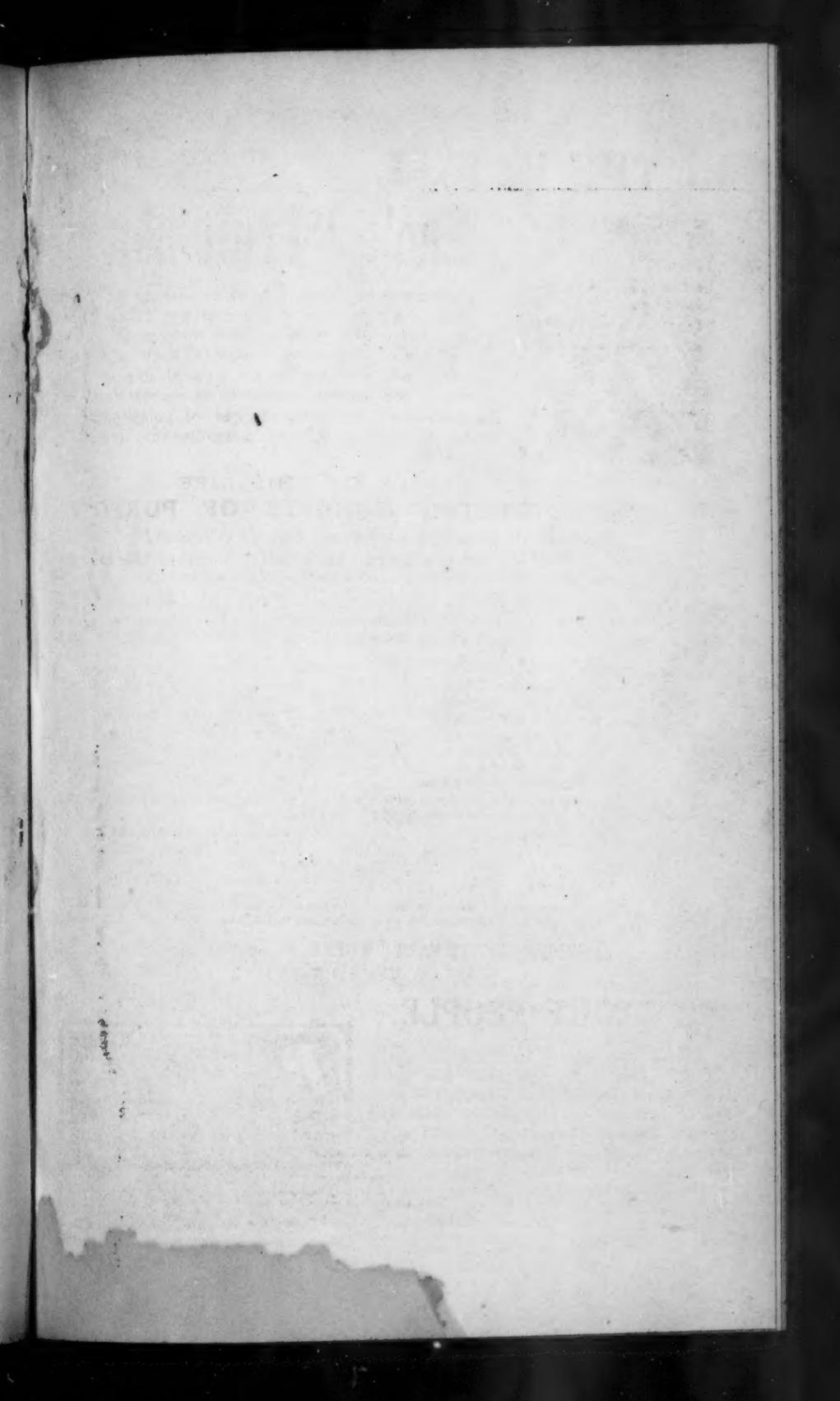
'Twas not for him—the festal throng
 Where wit and beauty beam :
 Nor yet debate on nations' fate,
 Nor field where rapiers gleam.
 He made no moan—he sat alone
 As if he did but dream !

It was three hundred years ago—
 The hall still stands to-day,
 And still there pass, through painted glass,
 The sunbeams at their play.
 Though fair and brave, and statesmen grave,
 Have faded from the way.

'Tis rather he, whom haughty hands
 Did lowly refuge spare,
 Who saves for Fame the old hall's name,
 And theirs who feasted there.
 For songs he sung with golden tongue
 Still echo in its air !

A poet's dream as nought may seem
 To careless passers by :
 A poet's heart must beat apart,
 (Because it beats so high !)
 But noble song Time cannot wrong,
 Nor true thoughts ever die !

ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.





Mr. TAYLOR.

"IT IS MY BROTHER—IT IS REX."

YORKSHIRE.

W. SMALL.